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THE PEOPLE OF JUVIK

I

THE TROUGH OF THE WAVE

THE PEOPLE
OF
JUVIK
BY
OLAV DUUN

A SAGA OF MODERN NORWAY

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN
BY ARTHUR G. CHATER

TO BE COMPLETED IN SIX VOLUMES

I.
THE TROUGH OF THE WAVE

The remaining volumes are in active preparation and will be published at regular intervals

NEW YORK · ALFRED · A · KNOPF · LONDON

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BY

OLAV DUUN

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN
BY ARTHUR G. CHATER

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The scene of all Olav Duun's stories is the district of Namdal, to the north of Trondhjem, where the author was born in 1876. And the central place in his production is held by this saga of THE PEOPLE OF JUVIK, *in six volumes, of which the present is the first.*

In order to place these Juvikings in their proper perspective, it must be remembered that there is no trace of a feudal system in Norway, no aristocracy or landed gentry, and that it is only recently that the country has become to some extent industrialized; the "old families" are the odelsbönder, *peasant freeholders whose land has descended from father to son, in many cases for centuries. These families are the bearers of tradition, they constitute the real Norway. Below them are the smallholders, who pay them rent for their crofts, furnish the hired labour, and are objects of charity in hard times.*

Though each volume of THE PEOPLE OF JUVIK is a complete story in itself, the whole series may be likened to one of the old Icelandic family histories, such as the Sturlunga Saga and many others. Duun has here

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traced the fortunes of the Juvik race through four generations, from the beginning of the nineteenth century (in THE TROUGH OF THE WAVE we hear faint echoes of the Napoleonic wars) down to our own day, with the introduction of modern industry (fostered by the Great War) and its attendant labour troubles. In old Per Anders the last of the old-timers disappears, and with his sons the family lies for a time in the trough of the wave. It mounts to the crest again with Anders in the second volume, and in the third we have the story of his children. The fourth, fifth, and sixth all deal with one generation, in the person of Odin, an irregular offshoot of the Juvikings, in whom some of their best characteristics finally bear fruit. All through we are made aware of the changing influences of the times, the slow death of old customs and superstitions, and the persistent pride of race. The clan feeling, ironically enough, is strongest in the weak and well-meaning Per, the first of the family to leave the old home.

This is not the place to discuss the linguistic conflict which has agitated Norway for the last two generations, but it may be explained that Duun does not write in the riksmaal, *the ordinary Norwegian language as used by Ibsen, Hamsun, Undset, and all those authors whose names are familiar abroad—the language sometimes known as Dano-Norwegian, though it is becoming less*

like Danish every day—but prefers the landsmaal, *or popular language, which is a synthesis of Norwegian country dialects, directly descended from Old Norse and as free as may be from foreign influence. This is a language in its shirt-sleeves, in Duun's case strongly coloured by the local dialect, and the tales he has to tell gain an added atmosphere from the rustic and imaginative speech he uses. His narrative style closely resembles that of the sagas: plain matter-of-fact, lighted up by flashes of fancy. Perhaps the only "modern" note is to be found in the vivid glimpses he gives us of weather and natural surroundings: highly original they strike us, with the peasant's unsophisticated personification of the elements, of earth, sky, and sea, mountain, forest, and brook. The racy intimacy of his dialect, full of hints and half-obscured allusions, is naturally the despair of the translator who has to make it intelligible to a foreign and heterogeneous public.*

Some readers may be glad of a few hints on the pronunciation of Norwegian names. J *is sounded as* y *("Yoo-veek"); skj (and* sk *before* i*) as* sh; kj *has a soft sound, something like English* ch, *but not so explosive;* aa *is the English* oa *in "boat," "oar"; Norwegian* y *is like French* u *or German* ü; *the other vowels have their usual Continental values (as in German); and final* e *is never mute.*

In this translation the terminations of some place-names have been anglicized; e.g., -ness *for* -nes, -voe *for* -vaag (voe *is the Shetland form of the Norse word, which means a bay or creek, often a minor inlet of the main fiord). It is true that one is led into some slight inconsistencies by this method, but perhaps these may be excused on the plea of convenience.*

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THE PEOPLE OF JUVIK

I

THE TROUGH OF THE WAVE

CHAPTER I

IN OLD DAYS

THE FIRST JUVIKING THEY CAN TELL US ABOUT CAME from the south, from Sparbu or Stod or wherever it was. His name was Per.

He had been married, it was said, and had had house and land, and he brought his mother with him. What had driven him out the Lord only knew. He leased a croft under Liness.

One day the Liness man came and claimed more work of him than he was bound to do by agreement. Per just looked at him. Come he did not. That evening his old mother hobbled up to the farm, wanted to see the mistress herself. "Do ye know what they be saying among the neighbours?" she asked. "They say my rascal's to wed your darling—God forgive me, they do say so." At Liness they had but one daughter. Next day the Liness man came and gave them notice; he let them have the rough of his tongue. Per went back with him, and when they came to the birch copse just below the farm, he set upon his landlord, knelt on him and went over him so that you'd have pitied the

man. Liness took it and said nothing, he was big enough for that; he dragged himself home with blood in his tracks. They used to repeat a saying of Per's from that time. "I took and set about him a wee bit; I hadn't a heart for aught else." Liness sent his wife down with a message that he could have Mærit, seeing how things were. Per said no, thanks, not for him. Mærit herself was down, and came back crying; but Per pitched his traps into the boat and rowed off. He was no dirty cottar body, he'd let them know that!

He settled down in Juvik. There had been a croft there from old time, and this he bought for his own of the Ommundstrand man and paid for it in labour. The way of it was that he put up a new house for the man, felled and drew the timber one winter and built it up the next. Folk said to one another in the countryside that they had never seen a man work before. New houses sprang up at Juvik too, and the land came into better shape, as though of itself.

Juvik lies right out on the fiord, but it lies snugly, looking east and sheltered from sea and storms. Nobody had noticed till now that it lay there, much less that it lay like that.

One fine day Mærit came there with her boy, and she stayed. "You'd better bide here now," he is said to have told her; "you can take mother's place, she

dropped off last year." Nobody had heard of that—when was she carried? [1]—"Carried? No, she's lying down the hill yonder. Better ground to lie in you won't find."—They never got married, but he and Mærit lived long and well and had many children. Nobody interfered with them, and they never worried about anybody either.

The eldest son took the farm, but not much else is known about him. They stayed at home, all the boys, and cleared Juvik from the hills right down to the sea.

One of the next Juvikings was called Anders. They were called Per and Anders turn and turn about. This one was nicknamed Bear Anders. The bear was making trouble out east, on Mo Fell. Anders came over there with his ax, they tell you, and went into the forest. It was black dark autumn weather, and he lay down all by himself beside the bait—it was a crofter woman's only cow, the bear had killed it in the bog. Two nights he lay there waiting. The third day he came back with the bear's skin over his shoulder, and after that they called him Bear Anders. They wanted to know how it happened—for Anders was a quiet sort of a man to talk to. "Well," said Anders, and thought a bit; "he came, and so I knocked him dead." It was no child's play lifting his bear-ax, when he left it in the porch,

[1] "Carried"—to the churchyard.

going into church. Not that they were great churchgoers, the Juvikings; there was a saying in the parish that God's word and Lapps' *gann* [2] didn't bite on them.

The son of this Bear Anders was called Big Per. Of him the story goes that one day when he was in the forest the Ommundstrand man went through the ice on Finnstad water with his sledge. Per had a feeling of it and ran down. He pulled out both man and horse. For that he got his daughter and as much land and forest as he liked to ask for; and the Juvikings were not shy of asking. They each had their own version of the story, though; the Ommundstrand man told it this way: "That was a bit of a pull, Per. Will you take my daughter, or will you not?" Per laughed on hearing this: "Oh, no, I had to duck him and duck him again before I got him soft enough for me." For that matter, folk believed what they chose to believe: that Per had driven horse and man through the ice himself; if not he was no Juviking.—But be that as it may, from that day the Juvikings were a different race. Such a wedding was held that it was hard to find anyone who hadn't been at it; for the Ommundstrand folk were kin to all the best families on both sides of the fiord; and there were new houses at Juvik, full of all sorts, and there was a power

[2] *Gann*—sorcery.

of food and riches that made folk stare; its glories were talked of far and wide.

And the Juvikings were talked of no matter where they went. They were a big family, and giants too, most all of them. They clung together like bramble-bushes. Stout fellows to look at, but, however it was, they were very apt to stay unmarried, barring the eldest, and he liked to look far afield before he made his choice. He generally took her by force, in a high-handed way; there were many tales about that.

Greedy Per was one of the last of the old-time men. He sailed south, right down to the Trondheim country, looking for a wife. She came of big people, they said, and he would hardly have got her by fair means. He was the only one of them who took much to the sea; he sailed up and down the coast, trading and the like. He was not the eldest, that was how it was. But then his brother died, and Per got the farm. Then he turned out a miser and a grasper, a real Greedy Per; by and by he became a rich man. It is told of him that he used to steal both nets and herring in the fiord, he took everything that swam, they said; but on land he was as honest as a man could be. When he was growing old he went round the fiord from house to house and restored what he had stolen. He could get no peace—in his boat-house, he said; and yours shall be yours and not mine.

They thought no less of him after that day. For nobody believed he was afraid of the dark; it wasn't in his boat-house the trouble was. And stolen goods are heavy, when you have to take them back. Of course there were ghosts at Juvik as in other places, it wasn't always comfortable to be in service there; but Per and the other Juvikings never seemed to notice anything; they were cold folks.

His son was called Anders. He was quieter in his ways than most of the Juvik men. He was just as old when he took over, folk thought, as his father when he gave up. But he was a shrewd and kindly man, and a great one to work. He paced off the bounds between Ommundstrand and Juvik and put up a boundary fence, marking off for himself the whole peninsula, straight across and right down to the point, and settled a lot of crofters on his land. He paid out his brothers with big money, and they went to other parts.

Anders had but one son, and his name was Per Anders. This was the gamest of them all and a wild fellow in his youth. It was he who defied Lapp *gann*. There was a *gann* Lapp going about the neighbourhood, called Nils Gadabout. Folk were so scared of him, they gave him the best they had. He looked in at Juvik one day, and there he got all he asked for, and more too. As he was going he clasped his hands and blessed man and beast,

byre and barn, house and land. Per Anders stood by with a grin on his face.—"Can you *gann?*" he said. The Lapp tried to get out, but Per Anders stood in his way: "Can you *gann,* I ask, you Lapp devil? You're to answer when I speak to you. Heh?" His mother begged and besought him to let the man alone, and the servants stole away, pale and weak in the knees, for it took less than that to make Nils Gadabout put a curse on you; more than one had found that out.—"You're a young man," said the Lapp gently; "but remember, she's old, that has the power."—"Now you're to try your *gann* on me, or you won't get off with a whole skin! Make my bones rot away till I drop! Take the hair off my head, as you did to the Björland wife—will you obey me! Come here with your *gann*-bag!" and Per Anders snatched the sack from the Lapp and emptied it. They turned away, every one of them; cold shivers ran down their backs. The father, Anders, stood looking on calmly and absently as usual, as if it didn't concern him. Then Per Anders took the Lapp and his bag and carried them outside, shook him as you would shake out a coat. But he took all his food away west to the crofts, for there was always somebody that went hungry. —Then the Lapp fellow got up on a big rock and let loose curses and evil upon Per Anders till the air was blue all round him. It was enough to make your hair

stand on end: Per Anders's legs were to shrivel up, the flesh would rot from his bones, his cattle would drop before they were properly born—in thirteen days his farm would be burnt down—a-i, a-i, a-i, oh! Per Anders clapped himself on the backside and went off. The crofter wives were glad to get the food, and Per Anders lived as before. *Gann* didn't bite on him.

Per Anders was to be found wherever there was dancing, in the parish and far outside it, and then he made it lively. There was always such fun where he went, though he might be among strangers; he was so full of notions. But they had to mind themselves: he was pretty ready with his fists too.

His wife he brought from a long way inland. He took a fancy to a girl at the fair, and next day he went to her home and told them he wanted her. Her father banged the table when he heard it, for he was one of the biggest farmers in those parts. "It shan't be!" he said. "Ah, but I wanted her so badly," said Per Anders.—"You? You lousy clod-hopper from the sea-shore! Do you think you'll feed my daughter on sour herrings?"—"I wanted her so badly. And now tell me one thing: will you have money or a thrashing?" Per Anders clapped his pocket-book on the table so that they all gave a jump—there was a pan of milk on the table and the milk spurted up to the ceiling. Nobody in that house

had banged on the table like that before, nor with such a pocket-book either.—"So you'd better come, Ane," he said, and she put her clothes straight and came. But still the Juviking wasn't satisfied. "Tell me," he said; "do you let your daughter go from home like a beggar?" No, that wasn't the idea either; the man had thought it over and led out two fine cows, produced silver and other heirlooms. "Ay, ay," said Per Anders, "and now you can take and lead your cows in again, and put up your trash, I have more than enough at home. And now you take a Christian farewell of your daughter, for, by my soul, you'll have to take care I don't make a cripple of you!" That is how it went, they say. And he didn't leave the place that day, nor the next either; there was such a fuss made over that son-in-law that it was a sight to see. The man was never tired of talking of it as long as he lived: "No, that Per Anders, the one who's married to our Ane, he has money, he has.—No, that table there, it's never been the same since; he gave it a bang of his fist, the one that's married Ane, and that was enough.—Farm?" he would say; "oh no, this farm's nothing to Juvik, where our Ane's married."

Per Anders settled down after these doings. He put up new houses at Juvik—nobody had ever seen the like: a dwelling-house in two storeys, with a kitchen and other newfangled notions, a stable apart, and a byre apart.

They said Ane tried to get him to pull down the old house while he was about it, but there he said stop. "If we had a fire some day, we'd be glad of it," he said. —After that he stuck to his land, cleared the last bit of it, and drained every spot that was soft. He took up the farm in his hands and finished it.

"They won't do so badly, those that come after me," he said. Though he was not much given to talking. He had three sons, Anders and Jens and Per; and three daughters, Ane and Aasel and Beret. Anders died young.

CHAPTER II

LUCY LONG NIGHT[1]

1

THEY COULDN'T MAKE IT OUT, THE WOMENFOLK: WHAT had come over the old man today? He dodged in and out of doors, and up on to the mound, time and again; he forgot to bring in the wood for them, and forgot to scold because they hadn't dried it as they ought; it was what you might call a peaceful house. They kept an eye on him wherever he went, in or out—perhaps he knew something after all? It weighed on their spirits after a while.

The thing was, they had fooled him properly the day before, they had done just what they liked behind his back; he had been in the woods all day, and they had been out and about. This was the way of it: one day the wife from Ommundstrand had come down in a great hurry and told them they had seen a glare over Juvik farm; they had been up at midnight to see after a cow,

[1] The Eve of St. Lucy, December 12–13, was reckoned under Old Style as the longest night of the year, and the folk-lore associated with this date survived the change to New Style in 1700.

and then there was a great blaze behind the hills, straight up from Juvik; it frightened them so they could hardly stand, but then they waked the man and all set off as fast as they could go, each with a bucket of water. But when they got to the top of the hill and looked out, there was Juvik farm in black darkness, as peaceful as could be; the houses lay there in the moonlight and hadn't heard a word of any fire. Ay, and then they knew what it was: they'd seen a warning! Just the same as was seen over Haaberg, the time there was a fire there; but then it was only the smithy and one storehouse that burnt, for those folk had taken care to send gifts in good time to the church and alms for the poor. And over Skarsvoe, before the fire there, and over Vanvik and many other places; and where they hadn't paid any heed to the warning, the fire broke out. They had seen it again and again: in blackest autumn nights, in moonlit winter nights—all around was dreary and dead, and right over the doomed farm a great living flame shot up to the sky, as uncanny a sight as you could see.—So it was that the Ommundstrand wife had to come over and get Ane by herself, for she wouldn't say a word of this to Per Anders; he was known for a rank unbeliever and cared for nothing but what *had* happened.—So yesterday they had gone out west, the womenfolk, to the crofters, each with a good basket-load; they had carried

off a sight of good food, and luck was with them, the old man *was* in the woods, and the boys too. For all that, they had run as if they'd stolen baskets and all, taking the shortest cut and never stopping a moment. But Per Anders was a sly fox; he didn't believe in anything, but he knew everything; that was his way.

But it just served Ane right, thought the maids, it did indeed, for she was so close-fisted it was a shame of her, she would never spare a bite for a poor soul; they might be glad if they got enough to eat, those who belonged to the place.

Ane Juvika was a thin little woman in the seventies; a sharp little nose and a pair of watchful eyes under her kerchief, there was not much more to be seen of her; she was a blue and chillsome soul, and the maids didn't know what to think when they saw her shivering, they asked if she was cold. She had a way of thrusting out her lower lip: they needn't think she had let the housekeeping slip out of her own hands yet. *She* didn't take any notice of the old man today. Not like her daughter-in-law, Valborg; she seemed to be the one who knew Per Anders best these times, and got on best with him. They said it was he who had brought her into the family.

Valborg was still young, between twenty and thirty; she was big and strong, with a broad, freckled face, reddish hair, and a white skin; she was a bit slow in

her movements and no great one to talk, but you could see she knew very well that she belonged here.

"He knows," she said to Beret, as they stood by the fire; he had just been in for a moment.

Beret was the youngest of the family, she was still at home, unmarried. She gave a terrified look at Valborg; thin she was, like her mother, and pale and bloodless and low-spirited; there was not much *to* her.—"Ah, if only he *doesn't*," she said.

But Per Anders knew all about it. He had heard it one day when he was talking to a man east on the beach, and today he had been to the storehouse; he was like the crow, he said to himself, he could count up to three. But that wasn't what troubled him today. It was the boys. They were so set on rowing north to Skavstrand after wood; and they had seen another boat going that way in front of them, likely a wood thief from the far side of the fiord. So they had some game on hand.—The boys, they were his two sons; they were past thirty both of them.

He stood out there bare-headed in the westerly gale; his hair was long and white and fluttered up and down in the wind; one gust after another bore down on him, but he stood as if rooted to the rock, big and broad-shouldered, stooping a little with age. He was trying to pick up a boat to the northward under the land, but his

eyes were not much good now, he could just about see where he was going. Eyes were the first to fail in the Juvik race, they were too pale a blue; but for that they were active men well into the eighties. He straightened himself and went in. His face was still almost young, red-cheeked and clean-shaven, the skin as white as a young girl's; so it had been with most of the men here; and the red turned to blue when they were laid out. The nose was small but sharp, and sharp were the eyes too, they tried to look right through whatever came in their way.

It was just before Christmas, but the weather was mild, just right for brewing and baking, as they said; and now the womenfolk were to set about it, no matter if it was a week too soon. Time to be quit of such old-fashioned foolery, for they'd been writing 1800 a good while now.

He went into the kitchen. Juvik was the only farm in those parts that had a kitchen; it was a grand thing to have, the parsonage itself could do no better, and Per Anders was fond of going into it.

Now they were going to take a walk, he said noisily to the womenfolk. They all looked up at him from their work. No getting out of it; west to the crofts they were going, with a little something in a bag for the folks out there. "Come with me into the storehouse, Ane," he

said; "and you too, Valborg." They looked at each other, but quietly put down their work and went.—"Look here," he said, "here's more food than we want, thirty joints of mutton hanging, and five or six big hams, besides plenty of bread and every other gift of God."

Ane gave a little cough inside her kerchief, and Valborg turned red as fire. For there were no longer thirty. He told them what they were to take: "That, and that—oh, a lot more yet! Here goes—and here—and here! Stow it away, wife, fill your box and your basket." And they had to fill them, with all the good food, that had shrunk so grievously already, the food that Ane never touched without a sigh. This was about the saddest task she had ever had, and her husband stood over her chuckling to himself, so that she didn't even dare to look up.

Anders, the elder of Valborg's little boys, came toddling into the storehouse. He stood for a bit looking on, then he began: "What, now again? And yesterday too! And every day! What'll become of all your food now, granny?" They took no notice of him; Per Anders least of all.

Off they had to go, Ane and Valborg and one of the maids; the old man went with them a good part of the way. And they trudged along with their loads, so dole-

fully, over hill and bog, enough to make you cry if you didn't have to laugh. Valborg, she laughed.

Per Anders laughed too, as he walked home. He drew himself up, as straight as he could.

That was the way to treat them, the womenfolk. For they were superstitious, and untrustworthy, too, and beating them was no use, any more than beating a goat. Per Anders felt he'd been fighting against this all his life. "No superstition!" he used to say; "don't come to me with any nonsense; we're grown-up people, aren't we?" It was as if he had been swimming against the stream, or standing under a waterfall. But he stood upright for all that. Nobody dared now to say there were ghosts at Juvik.—Oh, it did them nothing but good to give their souls a sound scrubbing, he said to himself. The boys —they were not up to much, but anyhow they didn't swallow every tale they heard; there was some hope for them as far as that went.

Per Anders had to feel sure of that, just as he had to feel he was clean about the body. For on that point too he was a little ahead of other folk: he went and bathed in summer and used the bath-house in winter. He scoffed at all the rest of them: womenfolk they were, afraid of water!

But the boys—ay, he really must see what they were up to.

Ah, wasn't it just as he guessed?—they were hunting the wood thief. That kind of thing amused them. There were an old man and a boy in a boat, and the boat was full of logs, he thought he could see that; and his boys were after them, shouting, now he could hear them—the old fellow was forced farther and farther from land, they pressed him out into the wind and waves, and his boat might fill any minute. The boys shouted threats and laughter.

Per Anders hailed them so that the hills rang. They heard him, but took their time about obeying.—"Do you hear what I say!" he sang out. Then at last they came in to the shore.

As they landed he stood on the beach to receive them. He watched them as they hauled up the boat.—"Is that a way to go on?" he said. "No better than dogs. There's to be an end of this at Juvik."

"Hey!" sneered Jens, the elder of them; "a wood thief!"

"I'll give you wood thief, you devil!" and the old man caught him by the hair and flung him against the stone wall, muttering to himself, what if they did filch a few sticks just before Christmas? *He* would talk to the wood thief about that!

Jens was a great hulking fellow, taller than his father, broad-shouldered, but rather thinner; he had a pale com-

plexion and a cold sneer; he was not very like the rest of the Juvik folk. He looked as if he didn't quite know how to take this—was he going to stand it from anybody? He was thirty and more, and besides he was the sort of man who, if he didn't hit first, hit pretty soon after. But he just slouched up from the beach.

The old man turned sharply to Per, his second son: "*You* might use your wits, you good-for-nothing. If you've got any."

Per set to work unloading the wood they had brought. It was dried, most of it, for Christmas, and there was the Yule-log itself, a great block of resinous pine. Per never answered when his father stood over him. He was the one who was most like his father; but he looked rather weaker, in both face and body; he glanced up for a second, and his eyes were gentle and calm.

Per Anders stood watching him awhile, then he went on again.—"Nothing but larking and tomfoolery," he muttered; "been that all along with these boys. Go the wrong way about everything. No sense in it, nothing but paltriness and petty devilry. Anders—if *he'd* lived, there'd have been a man of *him*."

Per and Anders, ay, so it had been, father and son, generation after generation. But then it came to Per Anders, and that finished it . . . the thought struck the old man clear and flat as he walked along. Well, well,

but maybe Per might shape better. He'd found him a good wife; Valborg was one you could trust.

Per Anders went in and took his morning meal; he didn't wait for the others today, table manners must take care of themselves; he had to go out. Where was he going? Heh! he had to make a trip across the fiord. He put on his Sunday clothes, the blue duffel frock and the long black breeches, wound a big, many-coloured scarf about his neck, and took a new sheepskin cap with red lining; he had made it himself, and he went over it and felt how good and soft it was.

Down on the beach Per asked where he meant to go. He shoved off the boat before answering. "Out for a row," he said. And then he added, in a hard tone: "I'm going to see what became of the one you were chasing." He rowed off.

Per watched him with a smile, for when his father was in that mood, it was no use talking. When he came up to the farm and heard that the womenfolk had been sent out, he gave a low whistle, and Jens looked up and laughed: "There you have it!"

It had come more and more to this, that Per Anders would have everything done in his own way. "It's getting too bad," said Jens; "we can't stand it much longer." Per only looked at him, almost as if he hadn't heard.— "But the womenfolk, God forgive me—ha ha ha!"

Jens smacked his thigh and laughed. Per smiled thoughtfully.

Jens took his gun and was off to the forest. He always did that when his father was out of the way. Per turned to and fetched up the wood.

There was a big difference between the two brothers, in every way. Jens was slack and had no heart for work, but if a thing had to be done he dashed in at it. It had always been like that with the Juvikings, but they had always worked their way *on*. Per took things calmly, but he was industrious as an ant; far too industrious, thought his father; he didn't know why he should think so.

2

There was a heavy sea running when Per Anders was no more than midway across, and under the opposite shore it was downright ugly. Per Anders took the shortest way to the Haaberg crofts, and there he found the wood thief. The sinner had no thought of denying it either, for Per Anders came upon him just as he was busy carrying the load of wood. He made a long face and his knees gave way, and his wife, who was helping him, dropped her log and stood stock-still.

"God's peace!" Per Anders greeted them.

Their answer was more like a gulp.—"Stormy

weather," said Per Anders. The woman recovered herself first and gabbled away as if her life depended on it: "Ay, it looks like a storm, it does, such weather we're getting nowadays, and what with war time and troubles, black year and famine you might call it, both on sea and land, ay, and that's the truth." She seemed to think she could talk him off with a cloud of chatter.

Per Anders knocked the water out of his skin cap: No, he'd only come to warn them that if they came across to the Juvik land again, they'd have *him* to deal with. Could they remember that? If so, he'd pass it over this time. "But mine's to be mine and not yours, and stealing's stealing, and a thief's a thief, be he never so needy."

Per Anders straightened himself and went, and they followed him meekly as far as the gate. "Look as flat as that, do they?" he muttered to himself. "Hey! Come across one day when the weather's fine, and be damned to you!"—he turned sharply on the man, making him jump. "Then I'll *give* you wood."

They began to bless him, and he made off as fast as he could. He took the road to Haaberg itself. "Phew!" he exclaimed, rounding his back and spitting. Ay, it was true: bad years and starvation everywhere, troubled times. And folk were just folk; it didn't take much to scare them.

Now he came in sight of the Haaberg houses. The dwelling-house came up below the hill, no use hiding itself any longer, dark and low as it might be, for here he came. But how small it looked! And *that* called itself a big farm-house. Long and low like an old jade, with a great ugly chimney on the roof, as if misfortune sat in the saddle there; it gave the whole house a broken back—you could tell who was the rider!

Ay. But that time he married Ane, his eldest daughter, into the place, he thought he had done a good stroke, and so did she. To be sure, Haaberg was the biggest farm in the neighbourhood, no doubt about that. But there stood the house, looking ashamed to be seen, like any poor man's cot; it couldn't be denied that the whole place was going downhill—had been for a long time; and now the man himself had been dead two years.

He couldn't help thinking of the Juvik farm, which looked so big and free: the house was high and broad, and the windows looked out boldly on the world, they were not afraid, they did not cringe for anybody; window-frames and doors all painted white. Here you had one window, and that a blind one, dirty brown and green—you could sit safely behind that if you were afraid!

Per Anders stopped and braced himself up.

Ay, afraid, that was just it. Sat cringing behind their blind window-panes listening for ghosts and hobgoblins as soon as it was dark. And afraid of a new house, a new white door; sat watching for the moon to fall on his head for daring to have such things. But so mad on copying him all the same; nobody dared to be first, and nobody dared to be last. Like sheep. Womenfolk were just the same. Ay.

Per Anders was faithful to old ways. Many a time he hung behind the rest. But all of a sudden he'd be seized with a notion and then he'd go at it and do the thing *his* way; that gave them something more to be sick about.

But it was Ane he wanted to see today; he'd been thinking a good deal about her lately. She had been so full of sense while she was at home, so grown-up all her days; she deserved to get on well. It was a long time since he had seen her. He hurried on faster and faster: a terrible time since he'd last had a talk with her.

There was not much light indoors at Haaberg, and to him, coming from outside, it was like grey dusk; he saw little besides the hearth, where the embers lay smouldering under the big pot. Inside the threshold there was nothing but the earthen floor, pure mud, to his thinking; and the floor-boards at the side were sprung and blackened like the stable floor at home in Juvik.

There they had a smooth-planed floor from wall to wall, and bright as daylight indoors, in the kitchen too, like the finest parsonage; that was something different!

Ane woke up a little when she saw who it was, though nobody could say she looked pleased. She asked him in, she set a chair for him, and he sat there talking of one thing and another. But her eyes were all over the place, it seemed to him, and she didn't know what to do with her fingers. All at once he burst out laughing and threw his head back in a way he had:

"Have you been given a warning about me, I wonder? Did you find two sticks crossed outside the door this morning, eh? There, you see! Or was it the crow instead of the magpie that told you I was coming?"

Ane seemed to come out of her kerchief and he saw very well what a bad way she was in. Hm. And, my word, how like her mother she was getting.—"One oughtn't to take any notice of such things," she said. "It's all superstition."

Hm. Pale and peaky, with a drop on her nose and all the rest; hiding in her kerchief and fussing and pottering about. He knew it all so well: up early and late to bed, and nothing ever done; the place smelt of poverty and petty worries. That was how it was with Ane, now.

They chatted on. Time after time she talked of her

neighbours. They were mean folk; this one did this and the other that, there was no getting on with them. Per Anders wriggled out of this, clearing his throat louder and louder: the neighbours, they were doing well, for themselves, hm! proper folk. But at home in Juvik they were brewing and slaughtering and getting ready for Christmas, full swing. And so it was all the year round: there were plenty of them, they went to work with a will, stopped to get their breath and turned to again. There was a fresh breeze about the place. They had been to Næröy fair with birch-bark last summer, and with *butter!* Sheep they were giving up, bit by bit —she ought to do the same: set aside more of the meadow land for cows and have the cows calving in spring: then there would be butter to sell, and that meant ready money. And why did she only have a boy to do the work?

Ane gave a little sigh and complained that the man she had had here was so unreasonable; the last thing was that he wanted four specie-dollars a year, besides boots and breeches and goodness knows what. No, if he didn't get another pair of boots a year he'd go; and go he did.

"Wrong, wrong," muttered Per Anders. They ought to bestir themselves a bit, they must wake up. "Get yourself some nets and send the lad out fishing when

it's black winter; it's nothing wonderful, but it brings in *something*." And finally he insisted, knocking it home with his knife-handle—for he was already at table: "Saving and saving is all very well, and the rest of it. But if you don't fill your belly with eating, you'll never fill it with licking; remember that, Ane!"

The food was not so bad. Not like Juvik food, of course, but it would pass. But he didn't feel comfortable here. It was like being shut up in a cellar. All the same, he ate with a twinkle in his eye: if she was so stingy, she shouldn't put good food in front of him; he had a mind to eat her out of house and home.

She began again about the neighbours. Then he got up and left. He must be getting home.

She came outside with him, and then he asked who was going to inherit the farm here. As she was childless.

Childless! she said, after a while. Hm! she was not so childless.

A still-born child is no child, he was going to say, but thought he would leave it unsaid.

"It was alive, though, when it came!" she said, and now her voice was harder.

"No, was it?" He was struck with astonishment; for they had all said, those who ought to know, that the child was still-born; it came just after the father died.

"They can lie as much as they like: I could hear there was life in it!"

He stood and looked at her. Had he laid too heavy a burden on her, when he sent her here? It came upon him, so sharply that it took his breath away, what a little homeless wench it was that flitted over here from Juvik that time. And now she kept inside her kerchief there and was an utter stranger.

"Ay, that's what I say," she went on. "And I'm ready to take my dying oath of it!—Oh no, they shan't drive me off the farm like a dog either!"

He didn't find anything to say and began to walk on. She went down with him, for now her tongue was set going and she couldn't stop all at once.

She said again, as she had said before: that she would take her oath the child was alive and had screamed; they'd have to give in to that! The more she thought of it, the more certain she was.

Per Anders sighed two or three times and shook his head; he seemed to mutter to himself, no, no! Then he turned and faced her.

"It's one thing to take an oath. It's another to have the oath on your conscience!" He was almost white in the face.

Ane said nothing for a moment. Then it came, quiet and cold:

"Rather than they shall put me out of the farm—For you know, I'm not afraid of the dark, father!"

"You be quiet now. You hear what I say!"

She obeyed. And he walked so fast that she could hardly keep up. The wind lashed their faces, and sharp grains of snow stung them on the cheek-bones. He did not stop till they came to the cross-roads, where the way to the Ness turned off.—Good-bye to her. And she knew where she had a home, if it came to that. She must see and bestir herself more, as he'd been saying; then she wouldn't be brooding over the same things all the time. And then she should let folks be what they were, those that were petty and mean, and not worry about them. And he put his face close to hers: "No, for if you're so unlucky as to take a false oath—it's a dangerous business that. It's *redoubtable!* Good-bye, Ane, and thanks."

He did not hear what she answered, and they parted.

"It's redoubtable," he muttered, with his eyes fixed on the road in front. Per Anders was fond of using a queer word now and then, one he thought was old and powerful.—No, afraid of the dark she was not; Ane was his child in that. But that things were going so badly with her, he would never have thought that before he came over. He he!

He had walked himself into a sweat, but still he felt

cold. He found himself taking the big bend round by the Ness—one would have to look in at the store while one *was* out and about. He went in and bought a big string of Bergen cringles and filled his handkerchief with biscuits; for he had a rare handkerchief. He was asked into the office and given a big dram by the man himself, as was right and proper when the Juviking crossed the fiord; but Per Anders didn't take much notice of them today, no matter who they might be.

The crofters followed him down to the water, wanted to help him out with the boat, but he ran her down by himself in front of their noses. But as he stood in the boat, shoving off, he called to them:

"Come across now Sjurs-mass Day,[2] we'll be killing a sheep maybe."

Then he bent to his oars.

3

The nor'-wester had freshened. He is never so keen as when he has loose snow to play with, and now he came in bitter little gusts and blasts. The sea was choppy and threatening, Per Anders was not quite sure about it. Perhaps he ought to keep his boat's nose in the wind till he came under the lee of the home shore,

[2] Sigurd's mass or "Little Christmas Eve"—December 23.

for the Juvik land runs far out to the northward. But he didn't do that, he let her drift to the southward. He would have to look in south at the Wick and see Aasel, now he was out.

Ever since he had left Haaberg he had had Aasel in his thoughts. The same as when he left home, thinking of Ane: just like a gnawing hunger it was, like a pain that had settled on his chest. He had to see her. Ay, and here he had goodies for her youngsters. For *there* they had children—the Lord knew how many they were now.

Aasel had married off herself, to a crofter you might say; he had lately bought a bit of land here. There was some hurry about it with Aasel, she had to be married straightaway. This was a great scandal in those days, and at Juvik it had never happened before. But Per Anders had nothing much to say about it. "Get married, then, in the devil's name!" was all he said. "Ah, so it's you," he said to the bridegroom, looking him over; "you're the one Aasel's taken. Well, she didn't look very far!" Aasel had always been a wild sort, all laughter and high spirits, but a good child right through, and a great one to work. Her mother refused to see her any more, and her father hadn't worn out their doorstep either.

The house at the Wick was a crofter's cot, there was

no getting over it. There was hardly a window in it, it was a squirrel's nest. But good to live in, no doubt. And the man was the same, Mikkal himself; he was like a squirrel. Not that he was blind like his house; he had eyes, bright round squirrel's eyes, and he looked at you like the squirrel on its branch, inquisitive and sprightly, a clever little beast; squirrel's teeth he surely had too, if he chose to show them. No, she hadn't looked very far for a husband, Aasel hadn't.—But a hard case afloat, ay, he was that! They couldn't come up to him, the Juvikings, nor anyone else. He'd kept an eye on him sometimes when he came beating home from the fishing-grounds—more like an otter than anything else, he thought. What chance he was at home today?

He was not, he was out after herring. Aasel was sitting at home alone with the children and her mother-in-law—and she was old and bedridden. Aasel was sort of scared when she saw who had come. "Mercy on us, is it mother that's sick now?" she asked. He had hardly ever seen Aasel so serious; it was not easy to think of her like that. "Eh, but are you fey, father, that you come and see to us?" Now her smile broke, round the eyes and all over her face. That was how she had been, all the time she lived at home. Her eyelids were puckered with sheer fun, and her face was

round and good like a child's, the girl was all good humour. He did not once take his eyes off her, as he seated himself and said the things that ought to be said.

"Ah, you're a treasure, father dear, to come and give us a look! That was a stroke of luck, as the man said when he found himself in heaven."

And then he felt how immensely long it was since she had gone away, and what a blank she had left behind; she had taken away her laughter and liveliness and her whole self.

She brought her children and showed them to him; she had four already, in four years—"we go by the almanac here," she said. "Look at them now—what do you say? No cottar's bairns, are they?"

He saw, he saw. He saw what she meant. They were Juvikings, these, white skin and red cheeks, eyes firm and blue; all but the smallest, who seemed to be all squirrel.

She chattered on. No, it was easy enough here, granny looked after the children, and the children looked after her, and they had no more cattle than they could manage, two cows in milk besides the bull and the empty stall. And, she said quietly, the neighbours were kind. If they wanted it, there was always a helping hand ready at a word; she told him their names.—He

pricked up his ears at this and listened. At last he smiled: that was how *she* was.

They were comfortable here. Clean glass in the window, bright walls, and a dazzling whitewashed chimney; floor boarded all over and an iron stove by the side of the hearth; a loft over the whole cottage, and a little closet for the old grandmother. It was good to sit here. He untied the cringles and opened his handkerchief; good heavens, so it was for them he had bought all this! They were astonished and didn't know where to begin.

Aasel brought out what she had—in such a hurry that she seemed afraid he would run away again—and it was Juvik food, all of it! It had been here waiting for one. Juvik food, *she* had it; she had scraped it together. He turned to the old woman in the closet: If they lived so bravely for all their poverty, then they deserved to be better off.

"Ay, 'tis bad, the gout, don't talk of it, child!" She was too old, she couldn't hear.

He sat watching Aasel again. And she watched him. Then he looked out of the window:

Didn't they have the good people up here in the mountain?

Faith, yes, they were at it all night, rolling down stones; hadn't he seen the scree just above the house? They both laughed, and this laughter did him more

good than the food.—"All the same," she said, "this is an uncanny hole, what with trolls and hobgoblins, that's true, father. But they're kind," she added.

"But how about your sister Ane, has she gone stark mad?"

"Eh?"

"She's going to swear a false oath. That the child was alive when it came."

Aasel went pale, little by little.—"No, does she say that?"

He sat looking down between his knees. He'd had such a belief in Ane, he said: *she* was not one to get herself into a mess. "Astonishing how fond one can be of a little girlie like that, one that never asks for anything, that will get along all by herself. And now there she is, poor little thing. Nothing left of her but money troubles and a false oath." He nodded his head. "Money troubles, they're pretty bad troubles, they can eat you up alive. And what is one to do about it, do you think?" he looked up.

"What if mother—?"

"Ah, do you think so? Well, maybe. And—we might put a wee bit of trust in the man above." He looked down at the floor again, and his thoughts were so far away.—Maybe it was so, he muttered, both at Juvik and anywhere else; if there was one thing you

didn't believe in, then you didn't believe in anything at all. If you didn't believe in lies and nonsense—if you were no longer afraid of the dark, then you went straight away and sold yourself to the Black One. No, Ane wasn't afraid of the dark; in that she was his daughter. "But"—he looked up into Aasel's eyes—"it won't be she that'll carry on the Juvik race."

"Well, I'll be more than glad to go over and talk to her; I'll put some sense into her, you'll see!" Aasel smiled, young and unafraid: she knew she'd be thrown out at Haaberg, but she'd go there all the same; she'd fall on her feet right enough, she declared.

She went with him down to the beach, with her whole flock of youngsters behind her, took hold of the boat, and helped him to shove off. The little boys sang out Ohoy! and went at it till they were black in the face. Per Anders took a long breath before he came out with it:

"You must give us a look at home for Christmas, Aasel.—Your mother, do you say? Not a bit of it; she expects you, child."

A pity she couldn't have gone with him and helped to row, she said. And tonight it was Lucy long night—

"Of course it is! Row? Don't talk to me—I'm a devil to row, I can tell you. And it's a mighty queer thing, I never get tired!"

He said the same to himself, as he lay out in the nor'-wester and put his back into it. The snow-storm wrapped itself about him like a thick blanket, he had to fight his way from point to point, hugging the shore so closely that he could have reached it with his oar.—Aasel still stood and watched him, so he thought; she laughed when the spray dashed over the bow of his boat, but she was afraid all the time, silly thing. It's no weather for rowing, she said.

The kelpie, she had talked about. They had *heard* it out here on the fiord. "Of course you have," he answered. And she laughed too, as bravely and cheerfully as might be—she was the one who ought to have been at Juvik. But just then there was a cry. Hah! it came from the wave just beside him, loud enough to echo in the rocks. And again, uglier than before. "Once more, while you're about it!" said Per Anders, and he laughed with surprise. "Shall we have a race?" For I'm a real devil to row."

It was black night now, and he was nowhere near Juvik. He put in to land, took a good look at it, then backed out again, tried one inlet after another in the blinding snow-storm. It was strange land everywhere. And out on the fiord it cried time after time, he couldn't help laughing: whatever it was, it really *was* there.

Per Anders would never have found his way home

that night if the wind had not torn a rift in the snow: and then he was off the northern point of land and had the Juvik voe right before him. Now for the first time he felt he was worn out and chilled through, he sat shaking on the thwart and his eyes were no good any more. "First I'm going blind, and next I'm losing my sight," he said, to ease himself and be the man he was. And then he turned to the fiord: "Good-night to you now, and thanks for your company—I'm going home, I am."

He crept into the boat-house and lay down. Outside all was in a whirl again and the path was glassy with ice; he could go no farther. And the boat-house was a good place to lie in, up against the pier, as they called it. He spread nets under him and covered himself with blankets and sails and furs so that he knew he was safe from the cold. That would show them, the youngsters, that he was still a grown-up man and not afraid of the dark, if it was Lucy long night ever so much!

It was Lucy long night. A night that has no end. A night when the cow wails in the byre, and the sheep too; and folk sit with their chicken-hearts up in their throats, shivering and shaking and chattering with their teeth: the good people roll rocks up in the mountain, the little men jump and dance around the walls, noises and slamming everywhere; who would go up to the loft that

night, or down to the boat-house?—"Oh, don't tell me! They can't bear to hear a sound." Per Anders settled himself well, said In Jesu name, as he did *every* night, and then he went to sleep. No, not that either, not quite, but he was dozing off.

Then there was a noise in the shed alongside. Something fell down, rattled against the wall where he was lying. There was a door to the shed, but it was locked, so he didn't go and see what it was. After a little while there was a sniffing along the wall, like a dog stealing about with his nose to the ground. Per Anders felt if he had his sheath-knife on him, then he turned his back on the damned thing and went to sleep. In his sleep he heard that someone came up from the sea, pulled open the door, and stood there, in the dark. The icy wind rushed in and made him wide awake. "If you're able to stand, I dare say I'm able to lie," said Per Anders, and he lay. Now it seemed the door was shut again, all was still. Per Anders pulled the rugs well over him, for he was chilled after his row. He slept a good while.

But then there came a racket up under the roof; he sat up and listened to it, with his hand on his knife.

"Who's there?" he called. Then there was dead silence. But then came more padding about, tramping along the beams and net-hangers, a big and heavy fellow.

Per Anders jumped up, found an oar, and struck it against the beam, so that it went to shivers: "Keep quiet here, I warn you! You Devil, you!"

There was a laugh up in the darkness, as quiet as could be, but deep, as though the whole night laughed. And now he knew it: this was Blackie himself; the Old One in person. Per Anders was on his way to go out, but he couldn't bring himself to do that either—there was room here for two, wasn't there? This was one who really *was*, no kelpie or other bugbear; it was no shame to give in to this man. He sat down. He was no longer himself, he froze so unmercifully. He said the Lord's Prayer—couldn't help it, though it was hardly fair to get behind that now, like hitting below the belt.—For that matter, they were all here, all the old Juvikings, round about him. So he was not afraid. He covered himself well and pretended to sleep.

And the night went on. Or, rather, she did not go. She lay down beside one, she was not going any farther.

He heard the cow in the byre, lowing and lamenting: "Long night! Long night!" And the sheep and the goat, they bleated, with heads tucked under their shoulders: "She's longer than two!"

4

Up at the farm they waited for the old man hour after hour and he never came.

They were a bit taken aback, the womenfolk, when at last they reached home and heard he was not there. "Heh?" said Ane—"has your father gone away?" Yes; Beret could say no more about it than that. Ane asked the boys, and they knew no more either. The others put it out of their minds at once—of course he'd come home again; but Ane couldn't get away from it.

"For that's the way with Per Anders," she kept saying to herself. "He never gives a hint of anything. Not to me anyway. But when he sets off like this, it means there's something on his mind."

After a while, as dusk came on, one after the other dropped a remark: "He's a long time, father is." Valborg stopped in front of Per and whispered, in a frightened voice: "What's become of your father, anyhow? He must be here soon?"—"Oh, *he'll* find his way home right enough. You needn't worry about him."

They sat down indoors, all of them, lit the candles, and threw fresh logs on the fire. The storm fell upon the house in heavy gusts, roared in the chimney like a waterfall, and the snow whispered all the time against the panes, in a restless flurry. They used no window-

shutters at Juvik; "No need for that," said Per Anders.

Sometimes Jens took a turn outside, and sometimes Per; Jens came in again with a little sneer on his face; Per thought of something else, there was this and that he ought to have done. Petter, Per's younger boy, went to sleep as usual, but Anders, who was six, stayed up a long time, looking sleepier and sleepier, but he wouldn't give in: "I'll have to wait up for grandpa all the same," he said; "I know my manners." He went on saying it even after he had fallen asleep. His mother picked him up and laid him in the bed beside his brother. She and Per slept in the living-room, and the old folks in the closet.

All at once, as they were sitting over their work, Jens gave a short laugh and looked round at them:

Wasn't it tonight they had Lucy long night?

They gave him no kindly look, any of them. They had just remembered the same, and so what good did it do to come and tell them that? Ane coughed a little and held her knitting up to the light; she just glanced at Jens, and presently they heard a sigh from inside her kerchief. After that there was silence in the room, they felt the evening closing down upon the house. There was a clatter in the outhouses. The smoke blew back down the chimney. By the corner of the house a ladder stood against the big birch, creaking and grating up and

down. It had stood there a long time, sawing against the tree, but nobody had noticed it before; it laughed and groaned with such heart-felt malice.

Now Per got up and shook himself; Valborg stole a glance at him, and he yawned and said he was going out to take away that ladder, or else it would stand there scraping away for ever. It was so ugly to listen to, he could feel it in his bones, he said. They were all queerly relieved when he said that. Bless us all, the ladder wasn't doing any harm! Jens looked up with his cold sneer: "You'd better take it away, Per."

Not long after, he lit a lantern; whistled a few notes, and went out. They thought he had gone to see to the horses, but he stayed out a long time.

As they sat wondering what had become of him, they heard footsteps outside the house door. The sound came into the passage, but only faintly because of the wind, and they paid no great attention to it, for it must be Jens, whatever he was about—and now there were footsteps up in the loft. First Valborg looked up, then one after another, and Ane said: "Dear me, how like Per Anders that sounds!"—"But it can't be anybody but Jens," they answered.—"I can't hear a sound," said Per. But then he got up and went into the loft. They waited with goose-flesh all over them; for he would find no one in the loft, they were sure of that, each and all.

He changed his mind and came down again, had forgotten what he was looking for; then he went out into the kitchen and took a draught of water. "Nonsense!" he said, as he came in.

They all turned to their work again, for they had their hands full, there was much to be done before Christmas.

Jens came in and put down his lantern. He was covered with snow and had to go out and knock it off. "Father must be stopping the night on the other side of the fiord," he said calmly.

"Hm, ay," said the others. It was such a comfort when anyone said anything. Nobody went to bed.

About midnight Per went out. Now *he* would take a turn down to the shore. But he could scarcely see his hand before him, it was like walking straight into a wall—the snow was falling so fast. Coming back he broke into a run, for it was bitter cold and he was lightly clad. At last he ran for all he was worth. When he came in, the womenfolk went off to bed, one after another. Ane last.

"Take another look at the sea, boys, before you go to bed," she asked them.—"Oh well, never mind, it doesn't—"

Jens and Per sat up a long while yet. Nobody ought to sit up on this night, but they did so for that very reason. "We're sitting here at our own risk," said Per.

"Or on our own rumps," grunted Jens. He took a half-finished wooden spoon out of the chest he was sitting on and began to carve it; he even gave Per a wink: oh yes, it was for a girl. He was clever with his knife, like a true Juviking. When he chose. Per was making a stumpy wooden horse for his little boys.

But they had to give up. For the night wouldn't give up. They were just dropping off to sleep, couldn't keep away from it. The cows were lowing in the byre, and the waves were dashing on the beach, there was no end to it. They got up at the same time, put on their jackets, and went out.

They walked in silence.

The clouds had now parted in earnest, the sky showed its bare face, wild and strange to them, a face of night; in one quarter a gleam of light showed, uncannily, but there was neither moon nor stars.

Jens gave a little shudder and turned to Per: "You don't believe anything's happened to the old man, do you? For he's such an obstinate fellow, he never looks at the weather."

Per was silent for a moment.—"You're always the same."

Jens sneered: "Eh, and what about you? Damn it, you smell like a Christian! You smell of decent folk!"

Oh, said Per, there was not much fear of that, with

either of them. But perhaps their father was right when he said they weren't properly grown up yet?

"Do you know, Per, you make me sick, sometimes. Faw! said the devil, when he got a mouthful of bristles."

"Now you shut your mouth!" Per said it so sharply that it gave Jens a little start. And then he added: "We may as well say it now, that whether father turns up again or not, there's got to be an end of our fooling after this. For you know it's pretty near time."

"Ugh! You're done with, I can see that. Married and done with, like any other poor devil"—Jens turned away from him.

This was the first time Per had spoken out with his brother, he had never gone so far before, and in fact it was the first time he ever said anything much. Nor had he thought of saying anything like this now. It sounded almost as if he would burst into tears, he felt it so badly. For there had never been an angry word between them, unlike as they were.

The farther they went, the worse he felt, less and less fit to stand up against the blow; and he knew it was coming, Jens kept such a queer silence. Presently Jens cleared his throat and said, lightly and carelessly as a child:

"Hm, hm, now I know what to do: I'm going to clear out. This time I mean it. Then we'll be quit of each

other. Hm, hm, that's it, now I know!" and he snapped his fingers as he walked.

He smiled to himself maliciously. He knew too well that now he had given Per something to think about for a long time. Before now, when his father had gone for him and he had talked of clearing out, it had been Per who held him back. He didn't say much, but he hung sorrowing about him like an empty sack wherever he went. And he couldn't contain himself, he had to come out with it: "You fancy yourself a stout fellow, Per. But you're a poor worm all the same; you shrivel up as soon as one pricks a hole in you. Ay, ay. Now you're going to be a good boy in earnest. Something like a good boy, ay. And that's the only thing you're fit for; and you're heartily welcome to it."

Jens had ventured too far. Per was still trembling a little about the lips, but he had pulled himself together and was far above the other, like a grown man:

"Maybe that's not the worst thing you could do, if you did clear out. As you don't seem to take root here anyhow."

"Oh no, I'll see I don't do that. Huff, boy!" He kicked at a lump of ice and sent it flying.

The boat was drawn up by the boat-house door, and the key was on the inside. They knocked on the wall

and called "Father," and after a while he staggered up and opened.

Had he been sleeping here!

Here, ay! wasn't it good enough? Anyway it was better than knocking himself to pieces on the glassy road; he had slept right well!

He came out and went up with them; but he stumbled and slipped so that Per had to take his arm. Per Anders laughed at this: a sad thing how old it made you to be getting old—eh, no! how chilly it made you to be chilled through—heh! His talk was all mixed up, and chilled he was, so that his jaws danced and chattered, but he talked all the time, as they floundered along towards home. And every now and then he pulled himself up and gave a long-drawn wail: "Oh, it's redoubtable!" When they reached the house he stopped and looked westward over hill and bog, to the crofters' cabins:

"Tonight they're scared, those folk. Tonight they creep under the bed-clothes. And yet it's a very different one that—that's scared them. And he—he's all around us. They'd all had their fling at him, the old fellows here at home. That's my belief. Father, and grandfather—there's been many a cool hand here at Juvik, that's sure. They left a broad trail of unbelief behind them—don't talk to me! But the Old One, *he*

was too many for them, surely. He he, I'll bet they didn't like it when they had to give in. Oh, but *they* were folk who left a trail behind them in the darkness. Not like now—"

At last they got him in, and he lay down just as he was. He shivered so that the whole bed shook. Ane got up and heated a rug to wrap him in; Per had pulled off his jacket and boots.

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" he said, and that was a rare word with him.—"It's been a long night, Ane."

Ane did not go to bed again, she stayed up and kept the fire in.

CHAPTER III

THE YULE GOAT BLEATS

1

NEXT DAY PER ANDERS DRAGGED HIMSELF UP, WHEN it was getting late, but he was not worth much. He went out time and again to see to the boys, stood bare-headed and blue with cold, and fell foul of them: had they stopped the threshing already? At Juvik they always worked on to Thomas-mass Day, they knew that, didn't they? "Don't starve the crofters," he said, "but keep them at it.—Tomorrow or next day we take the pigs, don't forget that, it's a silly way to let it bide any longer." And all at once he asked if they'd remembered to water the horses. Then he crawled in, old and shrunken; from behind he looked quite done for.

"I almost think that's the last time the old man will get me by the hair," said Jens, when he had gone.

Per smiled and agreed, he was all complaisance today. Good child all over, as Jens said.

Per Anders went and sat down beside Ane, who had her hands full of needlework.—"You mustn't bear me

ill will, Ane," he said at last; "for making you go *twice* west to the crofts. You know, you haven't broken your back with charity, Ane, in your time. Oh, I know, they deserve a beating more than a feeding. They're always the same, the lazy dogs. But I don't know. It feels so good; for oneself, I mean. When you're getting old and thin-blooded—you're getting older too, Ane. Up to now," he said, smiling to himself—"up to now it was I that was the older of us two." Then he thought of something else: "He he! Fire warning! What kind of vermin's that?"

Ane looked up from under her kerchief: Faith, he hadn't far to go now; strange how time passed.

"But, you see, a poor devil must have something to believe in," he said, and then he left her.

In the evening he came after her to the door of the byre; she was there looking after the beasts that were being fattened. He passed his hand several times over the neck of the big wether: "Feel here, Ane, come and feel. He's just ready." He wouldn't give in till she had felt. "Well, what do you say, Ane?"—"Oh, ay."—"Won't he make a grand wether for a funeral ale? I couldn't wish myself a better."

"Such talk!" sniffed Ane and shut the byre door, and then they trudged back. She saw how it irked him to walk. He noticed that and grumbled: "Foot-gear

nowadays, it's just trash. Nothing but heels. No—'Low heel and deep tread,' said Old Per Juvika, and that was a good saying!"

As he said that, he slipped on the ice and came down sitting. "Now you'll have your laugh all the same, won't you?" he thought to himself, looking at her.

Ane Juvika never laughed, except when somebody took a tumble, but then she made up for it. She laughed now till she was black in the face, and thought it was very sinful of her. Per Anders got on his feet again; she offered to help him, but he shook her off. It was the first time he had felt hurt by her laughter.

In the evening he sought out Per, who was up in the loft at work on a new bed. Per Anders seated himself on the carpenter's bench, right in his way. He looked up at the roof-beams, over which lay a pile of boards and other unused wood. He cleared his throat.

"Suppose it should happen, Per, that I dropped off one of these days—but, mind you, I don't mean to—then you're to take those boards for my coffin. Remember that." He pointed them out, they were stout deal boards. "For I mean to have boards that'll last for a bit. I was a fool to lend out my coffin—it's not right to have to trust to others to make a coffin for you. But you're not much of a bungler, you'll manage it, I dare say. Make her strong, Per!"

He talked on for a while about this and that, then slipped off the bench and out. At the door he turned; there was something he wanted to say, but he couldn't call to mind what it was.

That night he sat on the edge of his bed looking at Per; this went on for a good while. He was breathing heavily, and his face was perplexed and miserable; it looked as if he was talking to himself. Then he climbed down and crept into bed. Per fancied he heard him mutter something about Jens.

They all went to bed early that evening, for they were tired after the night before, besides which the boys had to be up early to go to the mill. They had put the home mill out of gear in the autumn—that was the first thing to go wrong at Juvik, said Per Anders—and now they had to go right up the sound to Björland with their corn.

Jens had gone out to the stable, and Per sat listening on the edge of his bed: wasn't he ever coming in? Per did not take his clothes off; after a bit he went into the kitchen for a drink of water, and then he took a turn to the stable. The horses had nearly finished their feed, and Jens was gone. "This evening again . . ." muttered Per, and then he went in.

It was a starry night and calm, with a cold air from the east; the bogs shone white and fine, and the forest wound about the slopes like a mourning-band.

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Valborg lay awake, but pretended to be asleep. She knew what was the trouble; and, besides, she was not used to interfering with Per. She knew him so little. Especially when his brother was in it, he never opened his lips to her. But now he spoke, standing in the dark over by the stove:

"He's off to the crofts tonight again!"

Oh, they couldn't be so sure of that, she demurred.

Oh yes, it was sure enough, he persisted. And all at once he hissed through his teeth:

"Wenching! Wenching!—You ought to be *flogged*, lad, upon my soul you ought!"

He went into the closet once or twice, to hear how his father was.

The old man lay in a broken, troubled sleep, coughing and tossing off and on; he was struggling with something he wanted to say.

Hadn't he better come to bed? Valborg ventured.

Oh yes, he was coming. "Just you lie down and go to sleep," he charged her.

When he heard she was asleep he lay down beside her with his clothes on, outside the coverlet. He stayed awake. The tall clock stood there ticking in its case, one-two, one-two, and the old man fought for breath in the closet. One thing Per could never make out, and

that was whether his mother was asleep. Ay, or how much she knew or didn't know.

It was long past midnight when at last he heard Jens at the outer door—he opened it gently and stole into the passage. By that time Per was there too, just as quietly.

The brothers knew each other in the dark; they stood face to face, as though holding each other fast with their eyes. Per closed the door well behind him. He seemed to notice that Jens was not scoffing now.

"Where have you been now, eh?" he asked in a low voice.

There was no answer.

"Haven't you any shame at all?"

"It's none of your business."

"Oh yes, Jens, it is. You know that."

Again Jens said nothing, made to go upstairs. Per stood in his way:

"You may as well know it, Jens; if you bring home one of those from the crofts—then *I* shan't be staying long at Juvik."

He could see how Jens took it: as if a branch had struck him across the mouth. For this was the last thing he looked for.

"No—no," said Jens. "But as far as that goes—there's no fear of that, just."

"Faw, it makes me sick!" said Per. He went back into the room.

"Ay, spit it out, then it'll blow over," said Jens, as he went up to the loft.

"For sure, it's wrong of him to carry on like this," said Valborg; she was so glad she hardly knew what she was saying.

"Oh, Jens—you needn't worry about him. He'll pull himself straight again. *He* knows what he's about. He wasn't born yesterday, you needn't think it.—If he only would."

Valborg could feel how he was trembling when at last he came to bed.

Jens stretched himself in his bed and yawned: "Tomorrow we'll have God's fine weather again, for all this!"

2

And so they had: clear sky and smooth water, and the Juvik brothers rowed to the mill.

Jens was his usual self; he was always in good humour away from home. He whistled or sang all the time, and now and again he mimicked one or other of the neighbours. He knew all the folk of the parish, and for every farm they passed there was one he could tell a

story about. Between whiles he made a spurt, and he was strong as a horse.

Per said nothing. He might be angry with Jens now and again; but he never felt easy unless they got on well. He was glad Jens thought no more of what he had said last night. For the last thing he wanted was to be forced to leave Juvik; or to see Jens do so. The oars, as they creaked in the rowlocks, sang in his ears: "Don't let him go! Don't let him go!"

And all of a sudden Jens spoke out, straight from his heart:

"Take us one by one, Per, we're two wretched creatures. But put us together and we're a pair of stout fellows, we are that; both in good and in evil!"

Per did not answer, but Jens felt that he put more back into his rowing· they simply lifted the boat on their oars.

But Per was not so cheerful, as it happened. There was something in his mind—something new and strange: "The elder shall serve the younger." Or, rather, he saw quite clearly what he had to do. For who should take the lead, if not he? But Jens was a queer brother to have.

"Now I've got it. And now it's gone"—it slipped out before he knew what he was saying.

Jens wanted to know what it was. "It's nothing,

really. But I get thinking about things sometimes."—"Ay, that's natural," said Jens.—"I can hear so plainly what they're saying to me. But it isn't so straight ahead."—"No, we're not rowing so straight either!" said Jens. After that he kept his mouth shut and there was nothing more to be got out of him. . . .

There was a crowd at the mill, so they had to hang about waiting a long time and a bit more; and the Juvik boat gave the miller some work to do, she didn't carry empty sacks, the saying was. On the way home they met the sou'-wester, and pretty stiff it was, so they had to turn back; for it's no good holding on in bad weather with a boat-load of flour. "And mind you, it's unspent weather, this," said Jens; "it's going to hold for a while." It didn't take them long to agree about this, and then they went into the shop and had a quartern apiece—one might just as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, they said. There were several more who treated themselves to a quartern, and real good stuff it was, so it came about that they drank a skinful. Before Jens knew what he was doing, he lost his temper; there was a grin on him, but he hit out—the others did the same, and then he boiled over, he wouldn't stand *that!*—he knocked them down one after another. He was known as the Juvik Bear, and they shouldn't call him that for nothing. This time, though, they'd have grassed him,

there were too many of them; but then it was Per's turn to fly into a rage, he turned purple in the face, seized his ax, and dashed in. At that a good spirit seemed to come over them, it swept away their liquor and all the rest of their truculence, as they said afterwards—for what could they do against an ax and a drunken wolf?—The end of it was that Per and Jens had another quartern, and then they buried themselves in the hay somewhere and went to sleep.

When they woke up, the wind had dropped; it was evening, and the Juvik men started to row home. For it occurred to them, wasn't it close on Christmas?

Darkness came and settled among the fells. The sea was black and smooth. A strangely still evening, the strokes of their oars called to the rocks and the rocks answered; the mountains rose black above them. The moon was in its first quarter, white and thin, its light fell only on the mountain tops to the northward, a yellowish gleam, as though it shone on a graveyard. They rowed and rowed. They had nothing to talk about, and that makes a heavy passenger in the boat sometimes.—Farm and croft they passed, lying along the shore without a sign of life. Here and there the moonlight fell on the grey face of a rock, on a frightened grey house or two that had awakened to so strange a day; then came patches of snow and again the black mountains.

Night came on. Never before had they rowed like this in the depth of night. Then all at once came a cry from the mountain side, the very ground opened and said "Hoo!"

"Horned owl!" said Jens.

Per brightened up, it did him good to hear somebody speak at last, and then he put his hand to his mouth and answered: "Hoo-ooh!" so that the rocks rang. He was a master at mocking the horned owl, had once lured him right up to the houses that way, and now he took it up at once and answered farther down the cliff. It went on merrily for a time, they rowed and hooted, and he followed them with his cries. But they soon began to shiver in their clothes, for now he was close above them, they couldn't see him, but he sang louder and wilder than any bird they knew of. They answered from bravado—"We'll teach you to sing dirges, damn you!" cried Jens, and his voice didn't sound just right.

Then he came and perched on the top of their mast. A great black patch came sailing down through the air, without a sound, like the wraith of a dead man; a big head with bat's wings.

"Haoo!" he sang out of his great open beak; they could hear how big and ugly a mouth it was.

"That there—that's no bird," said Per, and he spat calmly.

"Go back to hell, where you come from!" screamed Jens, shaking the rigging.

Blackie spread his wings, but sat still. He was even more uncanny now that he was silent.

Jens took an oar and waved it in the air. It was no use. Now he hooted again, in a *human voice!* Per couldn't help it, he answered. Then came a cold sneering laugh, as you might hear from a madman possessed of the devil.

And now there was an answer from among the hills, up on the Black Rock at home, a long and lusty fleering, enough to make your hair stand on end. The one on the mast took wing and flew to the crag—now they were two in the boat and two up there! And now came the cry, just as they were waiting for it: "Per and Jens!" it cried; "Per and Jens!"

The men rowed on in silence. They made fast the boat to a stone on the hard at home, heaved the kedge over the stern, and went their way.

But then Jens turned round and rapped out an oath that they were not going to *do* this, no; the sacks were going up, if he had to carry them all himself.—"I was just thinking the same," said Per. The way they did it was that Jens stood in the water with his sea-boots pulled high and passed sack after sack to Per, and Per dumped them against the boat-house wall; it went like chaff

before a gale. But while they were about it they might as well carry the flour into the boat-house, and then they hauled up the boat.

They were now as calm as could be, took the food-box and the milk-pail and went.

"He must have been the same one that was after the Skarsvoe fellows one time," said Jens—he didn't really care what it was, but he stopped and listened to the eastward.

"If only one could tell—what that kind of thing *means*," muttered Per. "But anyhow—if I'm thirsty, I'm going to drink, and if I'm wild, I'm going to hit out; I don't ask anybody's leave!"—he felt he was burning hot, and he walked on. "For if anybody has anything to say to me, let him come and say it in plain words." The Skarsvoe fellows, ay, they got a scare that cured them; but they didn't count for much anyway, there wasn't much life in them.

But what was that? There was somebody going up the road in front of them, a little old man, round-shouldered and shrunken; but he left them behind, disappeared in the darkness up the hill.

"Hm, hm!" said Per. "Is that the way it's going?"

"Father can't have long now," said Jens. For it wasn't meant for them, this time.

They stepped out for home.

But Per Anders lay asleep in the closet, a little uneasy and short of breath, but otherwise he didn't look badly.

"Tomorrow he'll be on his feet again," said Jens; he came out with a light heart.

Per followed him. "If only I knew what he wanted with me, that bird," he was thinking; for a bird he was and nothing else, but why couldn't he have stayed at home?

3

Per Anders did not get up next day. They soon saw what way it was going.

Jens and Per showed no sign. When they were alone together Jens made fun of what had happened the night before: It *hadn't* really happened, not a bit of it, that thing on the mast was all a lie—a stray horned owl at the worst!—Yes? said Per; he hadn't thought it anything else. But Jens was smiling wherever he went: Per couldn't fool him. He came upon him time after time, standing lost in thought. "There he stands as if someone had pulled his cap over his eyes, he doesn't see a thing but black darkness; and he thinks he must get to the bottom of that! Well, I'm a lucky man, I am!" He said the same to Per when he joined him in the smithy: "I'm a lucky man, I am, Per!"—he planted his fists firmly on the bench.—"Yes?" Per looked up.

He had never doubted it. "But what about a man who doesn't know whether he's to go forward or backward?" he said, looking down at his work. "Hears that something's talking to him, and yet can't hear a word."—Jens was already outside.

As Per was going into the house he ran into a woman with a pail in her hand. He looked at her. She must be from the other side of the fiord. His face stiffened, as it always did before a beggar. He called to Valborg in the kitchen, and she came out. "Here's one with a pail," he said. "You'll have to throw her something, to stop her begging." He was there again when the woman came round the corner: "Isn't he with you, your husband? Well, then tell him to come to the smithy." The man came; it was the wood thief they had chased. "Where have you got your bag?" asked Per. The man fumbled with his jacket and pulled it out. "Come on"—and Per went to the storehouse. He filled the man's bag and slung it on his neck: it was all he could do to stand under it. Per turned away, looking as if he was pretty angry, and the other had no chance to say thanks. Then Per came back; he was laughing with his eyes screwed up: "If you come stealing wood any more, you'll get beaten. You rowed like a man, last time you were out."

Meanwhile the Christmas work went on as usual, the

pigs bled, the beer fermented, everything was ready that had to be ready, and then there was washing of both clothes and bodies. And winter came, real whitest winter with moonlight and good going for sledges. A load dropped from the shoulders of each, one could breathe again like a new man. The earth about one had turned friendly, and the sea too put on a bright look, even the cold gave its bite for old times' sake. The night was not much to wrestle with any longer, it could not get in; a God's word if one had to go out, a scrap of prayer before one went to sleep, that was all you needed.

The old man lay asleep most of the time. Then all at once he would be wide awake, asking after the boys and what they were about, whether the wood was brought in, or had they forgotten to water the horses. At other times he started up from his doze and fought and panted; it was so hard to get his breath, he was angry about it, couldn't make it out, it must be a spite! "It's stopping all my works!" he wailed. Then Ane had to come in and put him straight. "I'm not going to die in the middle of Christmas, am I?" he said. On the morning of Christmas Eve he asked if they had sent out the fresh-killed meat. Oh yes, they had been to this place and that. Ah, but had they been to Aasel's? They looked at each other, but then Valborg answered: "Yes, Per's just going." Then he raised himself in bed: "God

bless you, even if you're lying. You mean well, Valborg."—And Per had to go.

On Christmas Eve Per Anders was better. He didn't get as far as the bath-house, but Per had to fetch the razor and shave him, and he got a new shirt on, and then he sat up in bed and ate his dinner, while the others were at table; for he declared he couldn't miss the halibut, nor the porridge either. "Christmas is Christmas, even if it's to be my last," he added. He had two big Christmas candles beside him, and Little Anders knelt at his bedside and ate his porridge. "Oh ay," he said to the boy; "now it'll soon be all over; with me. And with your father too. Then it'll be your turn, youngster. Eat away now; and let me hear there's to be a man of you. Are you afraid of the Yule goat, eh?"—Oh no, Anders wasn't afraid just then.

But when he appeared, the boy was properly frightened; a long, yellow face came in front of the window, and it bleated enough to make his flesh creep; it was a monstrous ugly beast and it upset others besides Anders; the maids jumped out of their chairs and screamed, caught hold of the nearest thing; and one of them snatched up the boy and held him fast, a great stout wench with a pale little youngster in her arms.

"Jens!" called Per Anders from his bed. He called a second time, in a tone that brought Jens slouching in.—

"None of your child's tricks with me!" he warned him. "For if you're not scared now, you're going to be; don't forget that, Jens. For you're not so much of a man as you think you are. Oh no, don't you believe it. It sounded like a death call for me."

He got no sleep that night, the food had done him no good. The others did not sleep either; they sat up and kept the watch-night, as the custom was. But Per was by his father's bedside most of the time.

The old man was now going rapidly downhill, and this was not the last night Per had to spend in the closet. Time after time they thought the end was at hand. Ane hardly got a wink of sleep, she was always with Per Anders, and he obeyed her like a child. "Lie down now," she said; "there, that's it; now you'll soon be better."—"Shall I?" he answered, surprised and happy. But it wasn't long before she had to come back. Per bent over him: "You must see that mother needs some sleep too."—"Does she now?—ay, ay. But shan't I be well again soon, heh?" He couldn't bear the others to see how ill he was. "You mind your own business and I'll look after mine," he said to Per.

One day in the holidays he was talking about wanting to see his daughters. "What's become of the children?" he asked as he lay dozing. Once or twice he thought they were there, and chatted with them off and on.

"You're in a bad way, Little Ane," he said. "You didn't make much of it. Ay, ay, ay! I know all about that. But it's no good: you must mind yourself!—Is that you, Aasel? Just you drive your squirrel off to the woods and come and stay here—do you think you have enough meal to last you through the winter, heh?"—Then he turned to Ane, calm and collected: "You'll have to send for the girls; it's such a comfort to have them all here together, a house full of them."

Messages were sent both to Haaberg and to the Wick, and on New Year's Day they came. It was like a regular feast at Juvik.—Aasel had all her little boys with her, the husband brought her to the hard and rowed home again; Ane came just at the same time, alone in a skiff. It took her a little while to notice Aasel, and then she wasn't any too friendly.

Per Anders had been in a bad way, his chest pained him so he could hardly keep from crying out; he said nothing about it, but he was hot and flushed and not always in his right senses.

When at last he saw it was Ane who had come, he tried to sit up in bed; but that was more than he could do. When Aasel came up with her children, he brushed the sleep from his eyes as it were, smiled feebly at the light, as a man does who has overslept himself, and then he greeted them one by one, in a calm, firm voice, beginning

with Aasel and going down: "So *that's* Anders! and that's Per, is it? and this one's Jens?—goodness me, what a lot of Juvikings!"

He tried to talk to them, but had to give it up. They could hear how his chest cut short all his words. He let his eyes dwell on them again; then he looked into the living-room, where Jens and Per sat playing three-card loo.

It was a white day, and the strong light shone through the windows upon the walls and all the faces, it brought a feeling of bright winter air over fresh snow. The floor was newly scoured and strewed with juniper, the walls bright, but familiar, with shelves and crockery and cupboards, friendly faces for all who belonged here.

It was still both in the closet and in the room. It seemed so long since they had been gathered together here, all of them. Only the clock ventured to go as usual; there was nothing to stop her, she was old at it.

At last the mistress bethought herself that her guests didn't live on Christmas brandy alone, they must have food. Jens got up and went out. Then Ane Haaberg came back to the sick-bed, her face shining with solemnity and self-satisfaction, blinking her eyes and drawing in her breath. She sat down on the edge of the bed and took her father's hand.

"Now, father, you're not to be afraid any more for me. I shan't—do anything wrong!"

He pressed her hand, muttered something like thanks.

"No, for I'm not allowed to—to make an oath, from what they tell me. Not I, but the others, they tell me. So you don't have to worry."

Per Anders turned his eyes upon her. Turned them away again. Then he shook his head, very slightly.

"Ay, for it's *redoubtable!*" said Ane.

He turned on his side, groaning a little, for he was in great pain, and began to stroke the head of Anders, who was by his bedside most of the time.

"Ah, Anders, Anders, I believe you'll do well some day. Though I don't think you're going to be master of Juvik either. And maybe you'll have a hard life of it, poor boy." He was looking far beyond Anders, and there was a strange, far-away mist in his eyes.

Then he lay back again, had a fit of coughing, and struggled with his chest. Ane, the daughter, came with some medicine, wanted him to take it. He waved her away: medicine had never passed his lips!

When the fit was over he lay smiling. "Sit down here, Aasel," he said. "It's no trouble for me, you see, for luck's always been with me—it's no trouble to die, you know, if it's given you to die in moonlight and clear weather. I know it now: it isn't all nonsense either.—

And wasn't it luck, too, that we made a drop in the still before Christmas? Luck's always been with me, she daren't be anything else."

He slept again and did not wake till next day. They were up all night, the two daughters; but Ane was tired and slept most of the time, and so did her mother. He talked and wandered in his sleep, and sometimes he laughed; it was uncanny to listen to, and Aasel said afterwards that she was all of a creep when he was at his worst. About midnight he lay listening, took hold of the side of the bed, and raised himself: "Listen to that ugly goat, how he bleats! Oh no, child, you don't scare me, you don't!"—The moon shone in so brightly that the walls were a-sparkle; it was so profoundly still and yellow outside, worse than the blackest darkness.

Just as they were starting for home next day, Ane and Aasel, he tried to collect himself and looked about him:

"What's become of you, children? Come a wee bit nearer. One is left so lonely at the last. Left lying all by oneself.—I've come away from the folks round about. Left them behind in the dark. Let them stay there. Come here, I say!"—They were all standing round the bed.

He looked from Per to Valborg: "Ay, ay, Per. Ay, ay, Valborg. You'll have to help each other along.

Juvik's a tough job. And—Per's a tough job too. It all looks so queer to me. You must be kind to him all the same, Valborg. If *you're* too weak, then I don't know . . ."

Then he turned away from Per, wouldn't look at him any more. He was losing ground fast.

"Oh no, there's nobody here that's able for Juvik. The family's gone to pieces, to my thinking."

They guessed how it looked to him: they were not worth much, any of them, and it's hard to leave things like that.

"Aasel, where have you got to?" She bent down over him. "Ah, there you are!" he smiled like a little child and felt for her hands. "You must keep plenty of pigs and goats at Juvik, when you get so far. And then you'll have to drain the bog properly, that'll be something to keep them busy, your little men. And—er—then you must be good to Jens and Beret, it won't be so easy for them. That's all. Right now—I take my staff."

He was asleep almost before he had finished speaking. Jens twisted his face into a little grin and went out.

Ane and Aasel said good-bye and went their ways. They would soon come back; they meant to look in again before he passed away.

4

It was not to be. The next night, towards morning, it was all over. Most of the time he was talking, perhaps it was because he had never talked too much before; but his talk was to himself, and there was not much to be made of it. His mind was full of the old-time men; it sounded as if he *was* first one, then another of them.

He was Big Per, the one who drove the Ommundstrand man and his horse through the ice; next minute he was Bear Anders: "Have you the pluck to stay out all night by yourself waiting for the bear?" Then he lay for a while sighing.—"That's Greedy Per, that is," he said. "Ah well, every little helps; if it only comes the right way; bless me, yes. Herring nets? What of it! I take everything that's adrift in the fiord. If you're *going* to steal, son, you don't need to stand shilly-shallying, you must take it as if it belonged to you. But now I'm a rich man—and it's to heaven I ought to be going. I know what I'll do: I'll take all the stuff back! That's a man's work, that: restoring stolen goods! Quiet there in the boat-house, I tell you—do you think I'm afraid of the dark?—No, boy, that's father, that is. That's Anders himself. Beat his wife, ay, who else should beat her? Tell me that! Now I've paced the bounds, now we've rounded off Juvik—and now I'm

drunk, and now I'll give them all a licking; I'm not drunk more than once a year, am I?—he he he! That's old Per Anders, that one, you can see that, can't you? Both Per and Anders, ay. Oh, I'm looking at you, folk. I'm listening to you. Lord save us, how small and scared you are! Ay, there's danger, don't you hear the goat? It's me he's bleating for, and you jump out of your skins. Don't you hear the racket over in the old house? Don't you hear somebody moving about outside here? There's a black fellow down in the boat-house. What did I see in the boat-house? Nothing to do with you, children. You can't stand the like of that. But I tell you, they'd had their fling with him, a lot of those old Juvikings. For *he's* a mighty one, he is; it's no shame to get out of the way of that fellow.—It's all *gann*, I tell you!" he cried all of a sudden—"I'll stand up to it, you'll see!

"But you, Per, you're nothing but a child. You and Jens, you hardly make one able-bodied man, the two of you together. A wee scrap of unbelief, ay, is that anything to boast of? Are you clearing a trail through the darkness, the same as I've done? Ha ha ha!"

The maids were afraid to go to bed that night. They sat in the living-room and slept. For they heard the bleating outside. They heard the rumpus over in the old house. Ane's face was hidden away in her kerchief;

she was reading a verse of a hymn, or maybe it was the Lord's Prayer itself.

Then he started up, listening: "D'ye hear the goat?" But he lay back again, with a smile: "Pooh! it's naught but the ladder and the birch. They won't scare me!"

There was something ugly outside the house, they could tell that. And there was a wicked one riding on the roof. It was a night of doom.

Per Anders had a dire fit of coughing and rattling of the throat; then he said: "Come now, Ane. Give me my staff."

"Pray to the Lord, pray to the Lord!" she whispered anxiously.

"M-m. If I never prayed to him before, why—"

That was the last he said. Ane opened the door, that the soul might depart, and then she arranged the corpse in the way it should be. She caught sight of the boy Anders, standing in the doorway. Valborg was aware of him at the same moment, and they both asked: "What is it you're staring at, Anders?"

The boy pointed to the foot of the bed: "What was that man that was standing there?"

"There?" They looked at each other; their knees gave way under them. Valborg took the boy and put him to bed.

Jens and Per were standing outside the house awhile

after. They didn't know whether to go to bed or what they should do; they didn't seem to know anything. They didn't find anything to say either. They just looked at the moon.

The clouds came sailing from the east, making westward for the sea. They overtook the moon, which was going the same way, wrapped him round, and wanted to take him with them. Then he turned about and made for the east, dead against them, full speed ahead. He had a smile on his yellow face, but east he would go, that was his whole object in life.

CHAPTER IV

THE SMOKE BEATS BACK

1

NEXT DAY THEY BURNT THE CORPSE-STRAW. THE AIR was still, with a breath from the east maybe. Ane herself carried out the straw, and she took it west into the paddock. She was indoors for a light, and set fire to it; then she went in again.

There, the smoke began to drift to the westward. It surged up into the air in a dense grey wave, now whitish, now yellowish, with rounded crests pouring westward; it was heavy as doom.

Ay, the smoke was going west. But all at once Beret turned to her mother— so thin and blue she was:

"I think it's coming this way, mother!"

"Hm! hm!" Ane had seen it already.

It came creeping straight on the house, surrounding the walls everywhere, they could feel it indoors, no matter what they were about, and they turned one from another with grey faces; the smoke lay about the windows; it was heavy as death.

"It's for me, that's sure," said Beret, and with that she went out.

"Oh no, child," muttered Ane. She was listlessly washing the death-bed, seated on the edge of it. "Eh, 'tis no matter for them that are young, that have their life before them. It's when one's old—"

But Beret had taken the rake and set off into the paddock; she ran straight at the heap of straw and raked it over so that the sparks flew about her ears. The smoke beat back on to the house just the same.

Jens stood by the stable wall with a mocking smile. Beret came quietly back, putting her hair straight and brushing the straw from her clothes.

Well, did she think that was any help? Jens wondered.

She looked at him, slackened her pace and kept her eyes on him. The run had made her hot, but now she turned pale as before, a long, blue-faced misery; she gave him a crooked smile and wanted to pass.

"Head up!" he said. "Death's not so terrible as he is ugly, you know."

"Oh no. It won't be any loss, the next one."

But he stood still and watched her as she went. It seemed all she could do to get indoors. No, poor thing, it wouldn't be any loss. And she hadn't had too good a time.—Just then he remembered so vividly a thing that

had happened when he was a child: one day he crushed a little bird's egg in his fingers. It had just the same defenceless blue tint as her eyes; he couldn't get away from the memory.

Later in the day he came across her in the kitchen, caught her by the hair, and gave it a little tug.

"Look here, Beret"—he had a little looking-glass in his hand, one with a gilt frame and roses round it—he had found it lying in his chest and it was only in the way: would *she* like to have it? For he was not likely to shave any more, he thought; he'd leave that to Per—it was quite enough for *one* of them to keep up old family customs. So, if she'd like to have it—

She accepted it, and she thanked him; her face was as stiff as usual, but she did look up at him. It made him feel foolish. Lord save us, she took the thing, took it from him, and was glad almost! She couldn't be quite right, poor thing.

Their mother was pottering about, today like any other day. Only that she didn't hear when they spoke to her. It was mostly Valborg who kept the house going.

The body lay in straw over in the old house. Valborg said to Jens, looking up from her work: "Now there won't be any flitting into the old house for Per and us. For I'm afraid of it now."

She had the same serious face she always wore, like a trusting child. Jens looked straight into it: it was so broad and frank, and good; freckled, but comely—and such a grand white figure of a woman!

"Then I'll move over there," he said. "For it'll just suit me."

She was not listening to him, and that always annoyed him.

Perhaps he would flit this very evening? he suggested —he'd like to have a dance with a dead man in the dark, eh? Devil tear him—

She turned away. She always did that when he put some strength into it, as he called it. Why did she turn her back?—she had the power of making him quite mad with that back of hers!

"It wasn't kind of father to give you to Per."

Valborg did not answer. Married to her? No, of course not, he was heartily glad to be out of that, but—

But now Valborg looked up. She thought long and deeply, a thought that went right through him:

"Well, well, you move over there. I dare say you might do worse. You and Beret too."

Jens pulled a wry face. He whistled as he went off. But he turned in the doorway and put on a careless air: "What's become of Per? Is he out rowing?"

Yes, he was, she answered—he had gone to see about the grave.

Per was across the fiord to start the church-bell tolling. This was an ancient custom, and no more than a form now, but just for that reason they kept it up at Juvik. Per Anders had said nothing about it, but Valborg was sure it was his wish, and it had struck Per the same way, when he thought about it.—Per rowed across in calm weather; he was in his shirt-sleeves, and it didn't take him long.

The sexton was a tiny little man, he ran up the belfry stairs light as a cat; it was a joy to him to ring the bell, whether for weddings or funerals; he loved his bell every whit as well as his glass. Per stood below and watched him.—"You'll have to give her a good swing," he called up to the man, and then he went into the churchyard. He walked round looking at the graves; it was so seldom he came to church.

Now the bell was going. The clapper struck the metal, struck it once more and with full force, and then the sound gathered strength and boomed out through the louver-boards in great round billows, down over the earth and up towards heaven. All other sounds were hushed when the bell began: they could do nothing against it.

Per didn't know how it was, but he had to sit down.

He sat on a grave, on a tuft of grass and frozen ground, for snow was not to be found here, it seemed not to like the churchyard. "There are plenty of dead people here," he said to himself; "and it looks as if they slept well." But he put his hands to his head; it hurt him to sit so near the bell—they had never had any great liking for that sound, the Juvik folk, he felt that now. Time after time he wiped his forehead with his sleeve; then he got up and walked past the north wall. For with such a sea-way surging through one—it was no good trying to sit still; he drew a deep breath and looked out over land and fiord.—"When the heavens themselves open above you, it makes them feel like strangers, the Juvikings; they turn pale and wan and look silly; would you wonder at it? For they have no great mind to come here, I can feel that."

Per hardly knew where they lay, his own folk. They must be on the south side. "But I'm going to find that out this very day," he said; "it's best to know where you're bound for."

At last the tolling of the bell was over. The booming still hung about the hills, like the evening after a great day. Everything took heart again and looked about: black rocks jutted out of the snow as before, and the fiord was salty desolation.

The sexton came out, his forehead shiny with sweat and a smile on his face.

"Was she heavy today?" asked Per. He was only joking, but he looked at the sexton and expected an answer. "Was she heavy, I say?"

"Oh ay. She was that," the sexton sighed. "I've known her lighter," he added.

Per bit his lip. This was the time Jens ought to have been here. They started to walk, they were going the same way for a bit. Elias had to jog the other for his fee today. He got an *ort,* and a dram thrown in. But Per stood looking at him blankly; he forgot to say goodbye. "And the grave?" asked Elias.—"Ah yes, of course—"

Per shook his head: "But I don't believe it *means* anything if your swine of a bell goes a bit sluggishly; damned if I believe a word of it!"

The sexton showed his great broad church smile, which reached from ear to ear. "No, that's so," he said, and went off up the hill and home. And Per went his way.

His mother looked at him rather uneasily, when he came home; she half expected good news, but dared not ask.—Had he been in at Haaberg?—No, he didn't happen to stop there.—Ah, didn't he? His mother was upset, for what kind of thoughts could they be that

troubled him?—"But the bell," said Per, "she went as easy as if she rang herself, Elias had never known her so lively. So if that means anything—"

Oh yes, thank God, that meant a great deal! Ane clasped her hands. She had to walk about the room. "Then he made a good end!" she said.

"She went as if she'd been greased!" said Per.

"Greased with heavenly fat," sneered Jens; he got up and left the room.

In the evening the two brothers met out in the yard.

"She damned well didn't go easy," said Jens. "I could see that in your face. There was no kingdom of heaven in that ringing."

Per made no answer. He stood there, dark and heavy as the shades of evening, rising above Jens and weighing him down. Now he was the one who had the say here at Juvik, and so it should be.

"Let her go as she likes," said Jens quietly. "There's nothing to be done about that."

"No," said Per; he stayed where he was. Jens had to make up his mind to leave him.

2

Next day they were in the old house, taking measurements for the coffin. Valborg came with them, she wanted to see the body again. Then the others came too,

now that there *was* someone there. Per took the cloth from the face.

Per Anders had his hymn-book under his chin, so that his mouth was tightly shut, and on each eyelid lay a copper coin. But one of them had slipped aside, so that the eye stood half open, staring at them. It gave the womenfolk a little start, one or two of them caught their breath, and Valborg went up and put the coin back, pressing it down.—The face was at rest, in a deep, cold sleep; it met them with a silence like that of the mountains. Per Anders had nothing more to say to them. Apart from that there was no change in him: his cheeks were purple, his forehead was white, and one eyebrow was slightly raised.

The women went out again, all except Valborg; she stood awhile longer, with her hands clasped before her. The body was clean-shaved, no doubt Per had done that. Valborg took the silver pin from the collar of her dress and put it in the dead man's shirt. She stood there a little longer, and then she went out.

"Well, there he lies," said Jens. "The last of us."

Per looked up.

"Ay—for it'll be a long time before it's your turn," said Jens.

"What about you?"

"I? Do you think I'm one that'll lie in state?"

To that Per made no answer, and so they finished what they were doing and went out.

They took some trouble over that coffin; it was a fine one. Jens said it was worth while to be dead if you got such a grand bed to lie in. But it was a long business getting ready for the funeral ale; and it wasn't very pleasant having the corpse lying at home all that time. The womenfolk scarcely ventured out of doors after dusk, they thought they had a white one at their heels wherever they went; and all sorts of ugly noises were to be heard in the evening. Although it was strange how little of that kind of thing there was this time. In former days, when a corpse had lain in the old house, there had been queer happenings: they were restless fellows in that way, the old Juvikings, it was said.

Per Anders left a blank behind. In other ways he did not frighten them. They almost felt they were alone in the place. For who was there now to go outside, if anything uncanny turned up? and come in again and set their fears at rest? Jens perhaps; yes, he could always go out, but he was so little help when he came in again.

One evening he said he must go into the old house for a pair of boot-lasts; and go he did. But he was pale as a sheet when he came back. He had caught his jacket in the door as he was going out, and it was just as if some-

one laid hold of him and held him back.—"Let me go, you fool!" he cried, and when he had said it he was half frightened, he told them; he shut the door behind him, but he felt like running.

As the day of the funeral drew near, things grew better. There was such a bustling about, they forgot all else. Except one day. Then the crow came and sat on the roof of the old house and cawed. And that is a sign of another corpse. Beret drove it off two or three times, but it came back at once; so she knew what awaited her. They looked at one another. But they soon forgot it.

Per went over once a day and looked at the body. He had a feeling that it wanted to say something to him. But when he was there it had nothing at all to say. It slept as soundly as before.

"Ay," he thought, "here lies the last. Of them."

And as he came out he saw it all: So the mountain range came down into the sea. It was not to go any farther. And as death had left its mark upon his face, so did hill and mountain look up at the evening sky: stone-still and stone-dead, so far removed from life and all that lives and moves. Per was surprised at himself: such strange thoughts were coming to him; where did they come from? He could not talk of this to Jens. He would have to speak of it to Valborg—to whom hitherto he had had little or nothing to say.—"Well, now

father's gone," he said; he could make no more of it than that. Valborg was bending down to wring out something she had washed.—"Oh ay," she said over her work. "*He's* gone." A good while after she straightened her back and looked over her washing; it was a great white sheet.—"Your father, he was like a path in the darkness, he was."—"Yes, like a narrow little path in the darkness. And now it's darker than before. And empty, seems to me."—She made no answer to this. She was red and uncomfortable, for this was something she was not used to.—"And empty, I say?" She might surely admit it.—"Oh ay; just at first it is," she said. He left her. It was easier to talk to Jens after all.—

A load was taken from everybody at Juvik when at last the Saturday evening before the funeral arrived; for then they began to come, those who lived farthest off, and from the nearest farms they sent baskets of provisions, one after another; you could tell each farm by its basket.

They came quietly, those who were coming to the house, and quietly they were received. It was not sorrow exactly, but there was an air of solemnity. Ane Haaberg came by herself, and afterwards there was one boat-load after another; and as they reached the house the host stood at the door and bade them walk in, this way, if you please, straight on and take a glass. It was

Petter Liness who was host. He always acted on these occasions, when the thing was to be done properly. He was a great man in the parish, so it was no small matter to get him; but the Juvik folk were related to him, so he came at the first asking.—Among the guests on the first evening, Ola Engdal was the one who made most stir. Whatever he did or said, the others followed him. He was old and rich, and carried weight in the parish; he was as good a man as Liness himself.

And he took it with a little smile. He just held their hands a little longer than usual when he greeted them. He had the same smile for every one of them, when he cleared his throat after a dram; the words came all cut and dried:

"To think I should be the one to carry Per Anders to his grave! Whoever could have foreseen that!" And as none of them could find anything to say, but just sat there glued to their seats, he got up and turned to Ane: If the others were of the same mind as he was, they'd go over and see the body.

Then they all crowded to the door; they cleared their throats and followed.

"Ay," said Ola, as they stood there. "This here's a death that'll be felt, and no mistake."

One after another said the same, and from that moment their tongues were set going; they talked of Per

Anders, and they talked of this one and that in the parish, with a touch of mourning in their voices, but with calm satisfaction underneath. For a feast was a feast, and this looked like being one of the grandest.—"Bless me, what a coffin!" they heard a woman say.—"Ay, you'd hardly flinch if you could get the like of that," replied another.—"No, and such fine weather too, both on sea and land."—"Oh ay, that Per Anders Juvika, he was always in luck, he was."—"Yes, and just think: they'd been distilling too this year; and that was such a rare thing with them."

And they tasted what had been distilled and found it was good. Nobody drank hard; they were decent folk; but it kept the talk going, and that was a relief, and it made them kindly and good-humoured. The people of the house passed in and out and sunned themselves in it; they had not known such a cheerful air about the place for a long time.

And it was the same on the day of the funeral itself: it passed off calmly and quietly, the weather was bright, and there was a deep warmth in the crowd of people. They had a tear in their eyes, many of them, and they left it for the sun and the clear air to take away. Not a thing took place but what was fitting. It was only Valborg who sobbed once or twice; a strangely sharp,

dry sobbing, it looked as if it broke her back. But she straightened herself again at once.

Per wondered at the folk. There was such solemnity about them, in every little thing; and most of all about the bearers. They walked and they stood as if they'd had a parson's training. *They* knew how it should be. He had never known them till now, had only seen them in their everyday life, and then they were rough and ragged as the grey earth itself; but now they turned a face to him that had in it the power of the church and the church-bell, he thought.

Jens bit his lip as he walked. "Lord love me, aren't they all dressed up!" he whispered to another young fellow. He was no doubt a bit primed already. Just as they were putting the trestles under the coffin out in the farm-yard, he burst out with a laugh: "Ha ha ha! have we got to have more ceremonies?"

Not one of them took any notice of him, and that seemed to take the bite out of him. Per turned red as fire.

On the way down to the beach he came close up to Jens and muttered: "You look as if you'd come on a nail in your porridge, seems to me."—"Look the image of shame, don't I?" Jens smiled. "Shame that's had its head bitten off."

Per passed his hand over his eyes. It hurt him to listen to such talk now.

He did the same when the bell began to toll. Time after time he drew in his breath between his teeth, as one does when touched on an open wound.

Ola Engdal saw it; he had his eye on Per. He was watching him on the way home too.—He came up to him later in the evening, and his voice was low and cautious, with a ring in it: "Oh ay, you're right there, lad. A man like that leaves a blank behind. That's bound to be."—"But that they should toll the bell for a Juviking?" said Per; he had such a mind to say something. "For they've been heathens here, every one of them, all their days—they say it's a long way to church from Juvik, don't they?" Ola looked him up and down.—"One thing's sure anyway: that you're no Juviking."—"No?" it sounded as if Per was glad of it. Ola left him, and Per repeated to himself: "One thing's sure anyway—ay. So now you're rid of *that* load, my boy!"

He went up to Ola again, later in the night; there was something he wanted to say. But Ola was talking to another and didn't listen to him, any more than they listened to Jens that day.

But now they had to listen to Jens all the same. Folk were just thinking of going to bed; they were out in the

yard, the whole party almost, young and old together, looking at the stars and the fine weather, chatting away quite cheerfully. Then they saw Jens standing in the doorway with a naked candle in his hand, he raised it on high and lighted them up; his face was white and his eyes were glassy.

"Do you want to know where to look for the world?" he shouted. "You're to look for it in evil!"

In an instant Aasel was there, and she hustled him in backwards. He struggled against her, but it was no good, he had too big a load, and besides she was helped by Valborg; they got him into the closet, and there he had to fall over the bed and go to sleep.

But on the whole they saw little of Valborg at that funeral ale. She felt such an utter stranger in the place now.

The guests did not leave till late next day. They took a long time going round and saying good-bye to one another before they set out.

They all said it had been a grand funeral. "*He's* been handsomely done by," they said. "And those that are left won't starve either."

3

Grey, sightless days. Winter had begun in earnest, and now there was no end to it.

A house is never so empty and dull as after a big feast. And at Juvik they went about feeling quite downhearted, for there had always been life and bustle about the house, it had never been dreary. Now it had come to a standstill, house and folk and everything, it had all lost its voice; now one could hear all kinds of things ugly and bad.—It seemed as if the men couldn't even settle properly to any work. They finished the threshing, and then hung about in the yard; Per was in the smithy time and again, but got nothing done, and Jens made one or two pairs of shoes in the evenings, for the womenfolk—there was more sport in taking their measure, he said; but you couldn't call that work.

"But just you wait till we get summer," they said. And the womenfolk repeated it. For it couldn't last till Whitsuntide, even this winter?

"Ah, they're lucky ones that'll live to see summer," said Ane. She often sat reading her hymn-book, and Beret had moved down to the closet with her as soon as her father was dead.—"Not that I put any faith in that about the corpse-straw," said Ane. "Per Anders never believed in such things—and it didn't blow on the house more than a moment either."

"No, Per Anders never believed in such things," said the others.

She talked about it more and more. And that about

the corpse not growing stiff—he stiffened pretty quick, so *she'd* thought? And the crow? Nothing but old superstitions; ask Per Anders.

Beret said nothing. One day Valborg had beaten Anders, her elder boy. Beret patted her on the shoulder: "You're a lucky one, to have somebody to beat. If it was only a dog!" Valborg gave a shudder; she always did when *those* fingers touched her. But she smiled and understood.

But one evening as they sat at supper Beret jumped up from the table:

"Hush! Wasn't that somebody calling for me?"

Jens laughed at her, and so did the others. So she had somebody waiting outside for her, had she?

She sat down again, at the end of the table, took up her porridge spoon and began to eat, but her eyes were elsewhere. The dairymaid, who sat beside her, could not help staring at her, she was not like herself. Now she looked round the table again: Didn't they hear it this time either?—They had heard nothing.

"Wait till it calls the third time—*then* you'd better look out," Jens warned her.

No sooner had he said it than there was a call outside, and now there was no mistake: it called *Beret,* and she hurried out. "If only somebody hasn't fallen into the well!" she said. Some of them thought they had

heard the cry, others said it was a cat outside the house.

"Ah, if only it wasn't somebody fallen into the well," said Valborg, and she got up to go out.—"Yes, and what's become of the girl?" said Per, following her. For the well was a terrible great hole in winter-time, with ice all round it so that you couldn't go near, and it lay in the middle of the yard; and deep as the pit. Never could the men be got to hack away the ice, Valborg had been at them often enough about it, she thought.

The ones who had gone out didn't come back, and so the others laid down their spoons too, they had to go and see what was happening.

It was still half light out of doors, a grey evening with black hills; the northern sky was flushed with coming wind.

Per and Valborg were standing by the well; Beret had fallen in, and they were just drawing her up. She was stiff already. Per and Valborg carried her in and laid her on the bed; Jens followed and wanted to help, but they had no use for him—he brought in one of her shoes.

"*She's* stiff enough anyway," he said, as they were trying to bring her back to life.

"Oh ay, oh ay," said Ane, when at last she could

say something. "But that *she* should be the one that was to go first!"

Jens turned round—he was feeling for something behind the clock—he turned his whole ugly fleering face upon her, as if he had found something curious behind there:

"Ay, one may be glad it—"

Ane drew her finger under her nose, she didn't quite catch this. Per looked black and stern.—

They laid Beret on straw in the old house, and then there was another funeral ale to be got ready. They said one to another that she lay with a smile on her face, did Beret; as if she wanted to say that now she was out of the road anyway.

Ane brightened up remarkably after this. It was just as if she had taken a new lease of life. Time after time she came forward and tried to take the housekeeping out of Valborg's hands; but she made no trouble when it didn't work.

Valborg was the one they couldn't make out. She said so little. If she talked at all it was usually of Per Anders—grandfather, as she called him. He was the one who had brought her here, to be mistress of Juvik, and he was the one she had confided in; now she was alone, but one didn't let oneself be pushed out of doors for all that. She worked enough for two, at

whatever she was doing; and she had her two little lads besides, a pair of boisterous young wolves, and carried the third under her apron, seemingly.

At Beret's funeral an unpleasant thing happened. Ane got drunk. She was all over the place, pushing her way in among the guests, as jolly as could be. At last she went up to the host and wanted to drink his health in a mug of beer.—"It might have been much worse," she said. "It might have been much worse. For Beret, she was never too sound. No, you see, the death smoke blew this way, when we burnt after Per Anders: it was plain enough there was another to come."

Aasel tried to get her to bed, but it was no use.—"Go to bed yourself, child; you're tired, I can see that," she answered. "Beret, poor thing, she ran out and routed in the fire, but what then—? No, child, if one isn't fey, then there's nothing to fear; I shall only be seventy come summer. So I didn't think it was time yet.—No, Beret—there was such a big star blazing right above us that evening we carried her in—*she* wasn't long on the way up. We didn't even toll the bell for her."

Ane's eyes were watery; folk had never seen them before, they were small and round and not used to looking one in the face. She drew her finger under her nose and laughed:

"And there's still four of them to share among; that's more than enough." . . .

It was about three weeks later, and then they burnt the corpse-straw after Ane too. It was blowing a gale off the land, so there was no trouble about the smoke this time; it had to leave the house alone.

She fell flat on the kitchen floor and lay there moaning. They carried her to bed, and there she lay sighing and groaning, till it was all over. One of her hips seemed to be out, but she had ruptured herself inside, and that was the death of her.

It was a gruesome end. She was so frightened. All at once she would start up: there was a call for her outside, didn't they hear it? There, it was knocking, didn't they hear that? Why didn't they go out and drive the devils away! Her eyes were wild with terror, she dared not be alone an instant. Now and again she lost consciousness, but then she came to again and there was the same horror.

Aasel came and saw to her. She just went home and did what had to be done, then came back and stayed with her till it was all over. Her two smallest she brought with her.

When she bent over her and spoke of the one thing needful, her mother generally grew calmer.

"Now you must keep quiet, mother, and lie still and

go to sleep!" she said at last, one night. "It's only father standing there waiting for you."

Then she smiled like a little child, quite unlike herself; so she must have looked when she was small, or that time Per Anders came and fetched her; her face resolved itself in a tiny childish piping:

"Ah ha ha! And I do believe it, I do!"

And when her struggles were over, towards dawn the same night, and Aasel alone stood over her, she stretched out her hand and groped in the air:

"What's become of you, Per Anders? Wait a bit, you're always in such a hurry!"

CHAPTER V

THE JUVIK GIANT STIRS

1

"LORD KNOWS," SAID PER ONE DAY, WHEN HE AND JENS were down by the water tanning nets. "Lord knows. It's hard to say how it was with that ghost fire."

"Ghost fire? What kind of a beast's that?"

"The fire warning they saw here before Christmas. Juvik's been emptied since that was seen. Whatever it was or was not."

Jens looked at him, quietly, thoughtfully almost. Then he turned away. He didn't say a word, but to Per this was as bad as an ugly cursing; and then Jens strained hard at shifting the tan-vat by himself, while Per stood by with open mouth. But all at once he laughed, a cheerfully offensive laugh, and flayed Per with his eyes: "Yes, you look a bit empty yourself. Like a pair of breeches that have lost their owner. I? you were going to say. No, boy, we're not talking about me. We needn't argue whether it's empty here or not. But anyway we're not afraid of the dark!"

Childishness! thought Per. But aloud he said: "If only it wasn't the whole family that—"

"What if it was? Pleasant journey to them. A fine family!"

Spring came, and summer followed. But Juvik did not keep up. It was so quiet, whatever they might be about; as when great and grievous things are looked for; or as when nothing is looked for any more.

Per and Valborg were at work early and late. Jens went at it like a bear when it suited him; as soon as he took a thing into his head he dashed away and finished it, flew off like a hammer from its haft. But it was never a job of everyday work.

One day Aasel came. The men were afloat just then, setting salmon nets along the shore. It happened to be Jens she wanted to get hold of. The thing was, he'd been going the right way to bring shame on himself and the rest of them, with a girl west in the crofts; she was in such-and-such a way! It was *true*, for Aasel had been there herself and seen the girl. Poor silly thing, she believed he was going to marry her! Now Valborg would have to talk to him; he was a little bit afraid of her, wasn't he? Aasel herself had skated too far on thin ice, and she was only a frail woman that he wouldn't pay any heed to. "Or else you can talk to Per," said

Aasel; she had made up her mind, and this time she was not going to have her journey for nothing.

"Talk to Per?" Valborg's face was a blank.

"Yes, go straight for him and get him properly warmed up!"

"Per?—Do you think that's as easy as putting on your shoes?"

"No, no, but—"

"Per, let me tell you—I don't know that I'll ever be up to having a talk with him. For—he's no little boy, you know that."

Aasel laughed till the walls rang:

"Mercy on us, what a mighty fellow you've made of him!"

But she saw she was taking the wrong road and was quickly serious again. She was so glad, she said, that Valborg believed in Per. For he was the only one they could put their trust in now. They owed her great thanks for being what she was.—"I can't help saying that, as I'm the one that sees it," she said, and they both blushed and were bashful. "But this is serious, this is, no getting away from it," she added. "He'll have to do something, and do it quickly too."

Valborg was not in very high feather when she took Per aside that evening; but she got it out somehow: that there seemed to be something wrong with Jens, ugly

tales about him had reached the place, they were saying this and that.

Per looked as if he didn't quite catch it. "With Marja Oterbekk?" he said. Then he laughed to himself. "Ah, Jens, Jens! All the same, he never did it; they're *lying!*"

"I dare say they are; they lie all they can. But you know yourself—you'll have to speak to him."

"Speak to him? Not I!" And he glared at her so that she wished herself out of the way. "You talk to him yourself! It's proper woman's work, that," he flung after her.

Next day Jens went and damaged his foot. He was trying to jump over a gully in the rocks with a heavy sack of bark on his shoulders, slipped and turned his ankle so that he had to limp home. He smeared it with hot tar and made nothing of it, but he could scarcely put his foot to the ground.

That day Per got ready a load of corn and drove to the mill. He smiled, for he could see Jens had meant to go the same way, if only his foot had been right. The mill was a long way west among the crofts, far beyond Oterbekk, and it was night before Per started for home.

It was such a bright-blue, light-sleeping summer night. The bog stretched endlessly away to the mountain, and

the wooded slopes faded into a grey-green dream. The meadow grass and rushes breathed a dewy coolness. Their scent was so mournful; for this was summer, and it would not last.—In such a night the young people were out, seeking one another; in such a night all sorts of things might happen. Per too had been out, in a night like this—it was long ago now.

Here from Högbrekka one could see all the way to Ommundstrand; the farm lay fast asleep and had forgotten all about it. And there Ane-Marget was asleep too. A little bird, with big eyes and little beak, he said to himself. Thank God, Per, that it turned out as it did. That it was Valborg you got instead. If we're going to talk about it.

"Hullo, have you seen something, Brownie?" he said; the horse had pricked his ears. Aha, it was just as he had thought. He tied his horse to the gate-post, for there was somebody sitting behind the stone wall, he had a glimpse of her skirt. He coughed and gave a greeting, and the girl started up and stood before him with her hands in her apron, not knowing what to do with herself.

"Good-evening, Marja. So you're out walking—out sitting, I should say. Ay, ay, it's fine weather for that too."

She turned miserably red all over her face. But she

was a fine girl, big and well grown; he had to go right up to her. "What a sad look in those eyes!" he muttered to himself. "So you're the one Jens has chosen, eh?" He stood and looked straight at her, and she took her eyes away; her thoughts were jumping all over the place, like mice in an empty barrel.—"You're not looking too happy," he said. "Things are pretty bad with you now?" He cleared his throat and looked at her sternly:

"Jens has gone and hurt one of his hind legs. So he couldn't come."

Now she looked up. She couldn't tell how much truth there was in this, far less how much malice. She looked as if she'd been struck on the right cheek and was going to turn the other, he thought. Per clenched his teeth so that a hard lump came up at each side of his jaw. He stretched out his hand and stroked her hair; it was black and curly like that of a gipsy girl, but pretty, all the same. Then he turned and left her.

As he was picking up the reins he said to her over his shoulder:

"You mustn't grieve over Jens, Marja. For you couldn't have got a worse one."

She had followed him, as though pulled by a string. But now he drove off.

He was talking to himself the whole way home.—"You can't bring a thing like that into the house, Jens,

can you now? Good Lord! what a—what a crofter face. Don't talk to me—she's ugly! Black as hallowed ground.—Eh! will you get on, you lazy brute!" he gave the mare a cut with the slack of the reins so that she broke into a canter along the stony road. The rumble of the cart startled the stillness of the night, waking every rock.

Jens gave him a mocking grin next day, as he sat cobbling shoes. Right in his face he rallied him: "I see you're of the same mind as I am?"—"Eh?"—"Yes. It isn't too much to ask that a fellow shall pick out the girl he wants for himself. The one's who's going to rub along with her, I mean—isn't that it?"

"Make her mistress of the farm? Have you gone daft? Just think of it—oh, be damned if I'll talk to you any more!"

"Right you are, boy." Jens started singing.

2

In a week's time Jens was well again. He had been grey and sour in the face while he sat indoors making shoes. Sometimes he broke into a sweat. There was something working in him. Per saw it very well, and it made him feel cold and wet, it gave him a shake.

At last Jens started out one evening. He meant to go west and fish the streams, he dug worms and got

out his rod, and then he went off. Per watched him go and he felt hot and tight about the throat. "Heh!—" he said, and now he was cold again. It must take its chance.

Jens put one shoulder forward, as he always did when he was set on getting anywhere, like a braced square-sail. He still limped a little, but he walked so fast that his joints cracked. And his thoughts flew on ahead with a whistle, it seemed to him. He'd had this in his mind all day and every day, while he sat at home and couldn't get about. "And now I know what I want!" he said.

He looked at the weather with a cold sneer, when he came to the stream: Heh! it *was* just right for fishing! Well, then, so much the better. The rain poured down with a hum, cheerful and unwearied as a child at play; then it stopped for a moment and listened, far away, and then it began again.

Jens never spat on his bait when he made a cast, and a fish-hook he called a fish-hook and a fish a fish, and so on all the time; he was a true Juviking, whether they believed it or not; and fish he caught, for all that; he saw nothing wrong with it.—"And tonight they shall see what I'm made of, the old fellows, whether they like it or not," he said; he spoke aloud in the roar of the torrent and bit his lip.—"Tonight they shall *see!*"

He did not follow the Oterbekk down to the crofts, but made straight across the bog to the Dölbekk, though the trout there ran so small they were not worth frying. He didn't stay long there either; he was soon down at a croft called Aune. There somebody came out and stood in the doorway, a young fellow, rather younger than Jens; he watched the fisherman for a bit and couldn't quite make up his mind. But then he plucked up courage and went down. Jens didn't let on he had seen him till now.—"Is that you, Morten, striding along there?" he said when the other came up; but he didn't take his eye off the line.

Morten walked down with him, looking on and chatting. He was slow of foot like a worn-out drudge, but his tongue went fast enough. He followed right down to the mill-race. Jens looked pleased.

Jens lifted his rod and stuck it in the ground: "Do you know what we're going to do, Morten? You and I and both of us? We're going into the mill to take it neat." He went in, and Morten after, with a long face full of wonder. Jens had a great birch-bark creel on his back, and Morten had had his eye on it all the time, but he had never dreamt of there being a dram in it. It was creepy though, having to go into the mill. The place was so still and shivery, and dark; the water

lapped against the wall and that didn't make it any more cheerful.

Jens took out a big tell-tale bottle, one of those that say cluck when you pour, and filled an old cup without a handle. They drank from it in turn; it was real Juvik brandy, and Morten sneezed and grimaced and liked it: you didn't get stung like that every day.

They sat for a while without saying anything.—"Ah, I've seen and heard all sorts in here," said Jens at last. "Many an ugly thing, lad! But look: it doesn't bite on me. Because you know, I'm in league with Old Erik himself."

He looked at Morten with hollow eyes, and Morten felt as if his whole body was covered with frog-spawn.

"No, that's sure, nothing scares me any more, can't do it. For I don't believe in anything, I don't. Except in the Old One himself. And he and I are great cronies. Heh?"

Morten shut his mouth again. He looked at the door, which stood ajar. But Jens pulled it to.

"No, but one of these nights I had a queer dream, I can tell you. I dreamt that the Lord came and took away my wife, and who should it be but that Marja Oterbekk. I held on to her all I could, but you see, he was too strong for me in the end; I had to let go. And she was no beauty, was she? Ah, you needn't blush at that.

Marja's good enough. In her own way. I should liken her to a good boat: easily steered, but staunch, eh, Morten?"

Morten gave a gulp, and Jens sat watching him.

"Do you know what I heard, one night I was grinding corn here? There was a call to me from the mill-race, the coldest voice I ever heard: 'Jens,' it cried, 'heave out a man to me.' It was uncanny. I had to promise. Heh?"

"Ay, ay, but—"

"You see, it would have to be an enemy, of course. For it's *redoubtable!*" Jens used one of his father's words now and again; he thought there was power in them.

"Do you know what I was just thinking, Morten? That you must take and marry Marja. That it's that they're after. Both the Juvikings and Blackie himself and all the rest—heh? Do you hear?"

Jens nodded sharply and his lips whitened. For it was the deuce and all if he couldn't get this looby to bristle up, to make some sound! He just sat and stared: had somebody fired off a gun in his ears?

"Ay, for you've been there, it's no use denying it; she told me herself."

"It was—a long time ago!"

"Well, do you think I worry about that? I? who

don't give a damn for either White or Black! I who've promised to heave a man into the mill-race, heh? And *that* I've a terrible good mind to."

Morten smiled palely, the way they often smile when they've got to die.

"Give me your hand on it, then!" Jens growled like a wild beast that has tasted blood.

Morten gave his hand.

"And now we'll go out!" Jens got up. He was smiling now, a sly and easy smile, like a blind man in the dark: he knew his way.

The rain had stopped, pausing to consider, with the tip of its tongue out; and the clouds had sniffed the sou'-wester and were making for the fells. It was bright as day though, warm and good, and the water and everything murmured about one so cheerfully.

Now they were going to bathe, said Jens. With their clothes on, what?

Bathing was a sore thing for Morten, and now, at a wild hour of the night? And with all his clothes on? He sighed and cast his eyes towards home. It was a long way off. And he'd heard many a mad tale of Jens Juvika, and now he'd taken a crazy fit again; and yet he was just as canny and wide awake as before.

"Look here then, you ninny!" and Jens took a header into the deepest pool, with a flash of white spray, came

up in the black water beyond, turning his dripping face this way—then he was gone again. Morten's knees shook under him; he was near gone with fright.

When Jens came out he took hold of Morten: "Are we friends or are we not? You're to answer me! Friends—good! Then you're going in the same as me. There!"—he took and heaved him out, though the poor wretch squealed and begged; he fished him up again and shook the water off him.—"Now you've had your baptism, Morten. Now we're friends for good. And now I know you'll do what I want. So that I won't have to heave you out to *him.* Now I know that. And we'll have a drink on it—here's a bit of corpse-straw at the bottom of the bottle, that makes it as good as a solemn oath, you understand. There, now you've pledged your soul."

They ran a couple of times round the mill to get warm, and then they took another half one.

Morten brightened up and spied land ahead. He would have been ready to promise more than he was asked.—Then they sat down on the ground.

"Oh, I'm a queer fellow," said Jens. "I'm not like other men. Do you know what I want to do, often? Just one thing, my lad: to sit on the top of Vatsli Fell blowing a horn. Blowing so that they'd all have to get up and dance—the old Juvikings and everyone else.

But sometimes I sit and *think*. Isn't that a queer thing? Per? you're going to say. Oh no, oh no, he's asleep all the time. Oh, there's a lot of different men in me. There's not many can make me out, I tell you. They were just the same, those old kings and giants, Goliath and Blood-ax and Bear Anders Juvika and all those; they were wild and savage, and crazy after women; and then they would sit and think, lad, and nobody knew what they were thinking about.—It's a strange thing too, when you come to think of it, that I should be sitting here having a friendly crack with you; with a crofter body."

Morten thought the same. He couldn't tell how it had come about, but here he was, the friend and fellow of Jens Juvika himself, there was no getting away from it.

They walked up-stream, but they didn't fish any more. Jens was still seething inwardly. "This is *life*, lad!" he said. "Oh, I can feel it right enough, I'm a dangerous man. One night I was in the old house while father lay there a corpse, and then someone came and grabbed hold of me. I gave him one behind the ear. Then he grinned and snorted and let on I was a devil of a fellow! Heh? Do you stand there grinning at me? You're going to take her, I warn you!"

"Ay," said Morten promptly. "You know I've been a bit sweet on her—"

"Hold your jaw, you dog! You know well enough *she* can't be mistress at Juvik; are you mouldy? I'm a landowner, I am; that's more than you understand. Not but what she's *a horizontal female,* I'll say that for her!"

They waded the stream somewhere, till it came up to their middles. Morten laughed and hiccuped, and Jens looked back and winked at him: "We two, we suit each other. Two jolly souls all three!—No, for it's not my game to take her. I mean to get *out.* You'll give me a leg up with this; you know the man I am. Or else I'll be after you, I will. And you shall have your croft rent-free as long as I'm above ground, remember that. But it's a good thing my brother Per can't hear what I say, for he's one of the old sort. A stalled ox. But a capital fellow, I tell you that. Ho ho, my boy, when he hears I'm friends with Morten Aune! But we won't say anything about that, just at present."

Morten had no idea of doing so either. He could hardly get a word out, when Jens said good-bye and thanked him for his company; but he'd have been ready to jump into the sea for him.

The night was still and peaceful. The scent of birch-leaves was so good, and Jens drew deep breaths of it, like a beast that had been shut up, he thought.—"Oh Lord bless my soul, it does you good to stir yourself.

Ha ha ha ha! How flat I knocked him! How finely I filled him up with lies! Free-handed lying, boy, that's the way—ay, we're still game lads at Juvik!"

There he could still see Morten, hurrying away for all he was worth, knock-kneed, but getting along; he must think he had a black one at his heels. Jens called to him:

"Did you get a scare, Morten? Did you get *frightened?*"

That was a word that would stick, he thought. But he himself set off, faster and faster, for this stillness was unnatural, it plucked at his clothes as he walked, trees and mounds pricked up their ears and listened; and this fog that was coming down, it was so strangely light and still; he took to his heels at last; he laughed, but couldn't help it, limped and ran like mad.

When he reached the yard at home, he stopped to get his breath. Then he saw it all, in a flash, wonderfully clear and strange: that was how they had run themselves into a fright, all these old bears here, man after man of them down through the ages—"Oh, it's not so easy to play the grown-up man sometimes, for all your unbelief. But Per's a little baby: goes and sleeps in the old house of nights, trying to harden himself and be like father. He's a long way to go, he'll never get there with his legs."

He started up, after he'd had a proper sleep, and looked about in astonishment:

Was it nothing but a dream? Wasn't he a king, then, on board a pirate ship? hn! hn!

Then he lay still. A thought came burrowing through him: Per. Now maybe Per was dreaming that he was king of all Juvik, what? Well, well, let him.

3

Per was not dreaming; he lay awake. But he had it within him, he carried it about in the daytime as a precious truth that he had to live on, that now *he* was the only one. They would have it so.

But now he was given something else to think about. It was not long before they heard there was going to be a wedding west among the crofts. The news travelled this way and that, till at last it reached Juvik.

Valborg put down her work, wiped her fingers long and well, and then she went out.—"Ah, Per, you're the one," she said, and her whole strong, broad face was thawed and tender.—"No, I knew it, I knew you'd find a way. If you only tried."

Per went down to the meadow to untether the horses. Valborg took up a bucket and went to the stream to fetch them water. Then it dawned on her, she couldn't go at him bald-headed like this, he wasn't a little herd-

boy, just—what was she thinking of? But now it was too late; she had to come out with it.

"Oh?" said Per. That was all.

"Don't you see now, Per, it *was* some use?" She looked him frankly in the face, too happy to drop it.

Ay, ay, that was so, he said. His eyes were so mild, as he looked this way and that across the meadow—"It'll soon be time to mow it, don't you think?"

"Yes!" She was so glad, she hardly knew which foot to stand on: that was the real Per, when he only chose to show himself. "Yes, now's the time," she said.

They walked together up the meadow and home.

Per said nothing about it to Jens for a day or two. They were in the barn, getting ready the hay sledges.—So there it was, he said. It had to be, and so on. And those two, Morten and Marja, they were a good match. Jens had heard it, hadn't he?

Jens stood still for a moment. Then he burst into a roar. Per stepped back, when Jens turned on him with his horse-laugh. But it put heart into him; he came forward again: Well, there was nothing else for it, the way things were. But, but—wasn't he just a little bit ashamed of himself?

For an instant Jens stood there, small and absent.—"I am that," he said. No, he didn't *say* it, but Per saw quite plainly that he said it to himself, and he turned

it off with something else: Morten might have his croft on easy terms now, so long as nobody got to hear of it.

"Now I'll tell you one little thing, Per!" Jens took up his hammer and knocked in a nail. "You're not such a mighty big man as *she* thinks you are. She goes on her knees to you; but you're no heathen god, any more than I am."

Per went to fetch something from the smithy.

"Oh no, you're right there. A long way from it, but—"

Then they worked hard for a good while. After the harvest they took the Juvik beck in hand, old as it was. It was a brute of a beck; it pulled down its banks, flooded them as soon as there was a rush of water, destroyed both meadow and cornfield. Their father had stood and looked at it, they remembered; but he had never said anything. Perhaps he had meant to leave it to them?

And now it should be taught manners, Jens said the same. Here were two who didn't shirk the job. Jens worked with a will, and stuck to it day after day, till Per was lost in amazement. He liked it, and yet he didn't like it. There was such a breeze about Jens, he fairly took your breath away; then it was quickly over again, as often as not, and that was what Per hated worse than anything. Especially now that they were alone.

For then it stared them in the face so plainly that they hadn't tackled what they had to do, and never would either. The only way was to make a match of it, work one against the other, as if they were rivals, for then there was a hope that Jens would keep on.—He did keep on. They dammed up the beck and deepened its bed a few feet, as far as the Juvik land reached.

The weather was fine, resting after the rain. The sunshine hung on the slopes from morning till night, with such colours, yellow and blue, that one had to look up. But the hay had rotted away, a lot of it, and the corn was as green as grass; thin too, and mostly weeds, for it had been a bitterly cold, dry spring. And now the bad weather began again, with rain and westerly gales. Things looked black.

"Dry year and rot year, and green year and frost year, but still no bad year," said Jens. Per sighed. A bad year it would be. Their only comfort was that it was worse in other parts.

Strange that it should turn out so this year, he would say. And he saw they had had the same thought, both Jens and Valborg, their faces grew so long when they spoke of it. A cold breath seemed to strike back from them: it *was* a bad sign. Was there one who wished them ill? But then he thought, putting one thing to another, summing up the whole world as it were: so many

calamities were abroad these times, war and famine and all kinds of ugly things. The signs could never be meant for Juvik. One day the smoke beat down and wouldn't go up the chimney, the horse stumbled and fell on level ground, ay, there were many signs like that; but the Juvikings had seen worse things in their time, and they held their heads just as high. If only he could put some life into Jens.

That was not so easy.—"Lord love me, how it smells!" he said. "Smells, ay, the whole place, Juvik and all; can't you see what I mean?" He would still climb up the cliff on Sunday mornings and roll stones down into the sea, making the church boats draw in their oars in alarm. Now and again he got hold of something to drink, and then he went wild and wanted to pull the house down. "I'm like the west wind, I'm like a wild beast, I ought not to be going loose!" he sang. He would take it into his head to thrash some man or other, put him a bit out of gear, as he called it. One time when he was across the fiord to a dance, he went right away east to Engdal, hung bells on horse and pig, and drove them out into the black night. After such doings he generally kept quiet for a while.

In the course of the winter he made himself a new pair of sea-boots and a new leather outfit; he was going to the fisheries.

They were in the barn when Jens announced this, threshing out what corn they had—poor stuff, but it would be a godsend to the crofters.—"I'm bound to ask you—have you taken leave of your senses?" said Per.—"Oh yes, I must have." He flung away from his brother, but suddenly turned about and looked at him savagely:

"I'm so sick of lying at home here with the maids—no more fishing in the water-butt for me!"

Per stood looking at the ground, quite a while.—"Presently he'll hit on what he meant to say yesterday," said Jens to himself.—"I've been afraid of that too," said Per. But that he should come out with it like this? The maids?

Jens went to the fisheries. He joined a boat with Mikkal from the Wick, who was skipper. It was lowering himself, this, for a Juvik man, he was no better than any other hand aboard—not even as skipper would they have gone to sea from here. But Per was glad he was away.

4

The storehouse at Juvik was robbed that spring, twice or perhaps more, and the last time it made a big hole in the food. Valborg came in looking pretty well staggered; she took Per out and showed him: Bread! and

butter! and meat! He had taken his time and had a good look round—and there! he had made a beast of himself to show his contempt of them. Per looked in the corn-bins. No, he hadn't taken corn.

The lock was old and worn out. Per got himself a new one, and then they were really left in peace for a time. The thief had been there and tried, one night, had hacked at it with his tools so that the marks showed. "I believe we're too many for you," said Per.

"It's a pity Jens wasn't at home," he said to Valborg. "Then we'd have sat up for the fellow."

"Oh, Jens!" she answered. "Jens—it's always Jens!" She went straight from him.

Soon after that Jens came home. He bubbled with excitement. His nostrils were distended and the veins stood out on his forehead, he snorted, but he looked happy, as if he'd been galled till it gave him an excuse to hit out.

"He'll come back," he said. "He'll want seed-corn, you may take your oath of that; Lord, yes, he'll come back. And then we'll give him a swim, we'll hunt him into the fiord, ha ha ha, my boy!"

Ah, should they really—? Per was sure he heard something whisper to him.

Damn it, of course! Jens was beaming with joy, and Per caught it. For nothing ever happened here. Jens

talked of it all day long. "I sweat like a tanner as soon as I think of it," he said; "oh, we'll have sport, Per!" Per was soon as keen as he was, and even the little boy, Anders, got wind of something. They couldn't get him to bed that night.

They lay in wait three nights, Jens and Per, one in the stable door, the other in the wood-shed. The third night he came.

Where he came from they couldn't see, but the storehouse door opened, it had to give way this time, and there stood a black shadow listening. It was a still night, grey sky and grey earth; the breeze whispered about the houses. A stamping was heard in the stables, a reassuring sound; and the cat came creeping round the corner, long and low in the back. And now the shadow slipped into the storehouse.

There was a whistle from Jens, and then they stole forward, one on each side. The thief was out like a shot, jumped the steps, and darted in under the supports of the storehouse.

"Wait a second, then we'll do for you!" said Jens as he ran round the house, Per on the other side. The thief ran down the slope, and they after him, spreading out a little; then up again on the far side, making for the woods. "Oh no, not a bit of it!" cried Jens, and you could hear him fizzing with delight; he put on the

pace, ran like a grey streak along the fence, heading off the thief and forcing him down towards the sea. He was light of foot, the rascal, they could hardly catch him if they tried—now he was up the rocks to seaward and into the birch thicket.

"Heh, heh, we're leaping like young calves!" laughed Jens. "We're running so we'll set the ground on fire—this is life, Per, this is!" He took a run and dashed up the face of a rock, the height of a man. The thief had to come out again, they saw him an instant against the sky, a big, tall fellow and long in the leg—ho ho, now they were off again! Per took a short cut and hid in the Black Rock cleft, for the thief would have to come that way, Jens was at his heels, hunting him from copse to copse along the shore: "Can't you wait, you lubber—how do you think I'm to get your life?"

Once the thief fell. Then Jens stopped and tied his shoe-string, growling: "Up with you! You're going into the sea, do you hear?" Now the thief was coming up the cleft, Per could hear him coughing at every breath, and now he'd catch him and give him a hiding and then take him back to the farm and give him a feed! Jens would have to find a frisky calf to run races with. He stood up.

"Ay, that's right"—he called in a loud, clear voice—"come here, you, I'm waiting for you."

The thief sank on his knees, and his breathing was like a long shriek; then he reeled off, straight for the Black Rock, Jens after him, and Per round behind, to meet him on the other side.

Jens came, but not the thief. It was light now, and they stood looking at each other. Per saw too clearly how it was, but he asked all the same:

"Can you tell me—where he's got to, the fellow?"

"He got *frightened*, boy! All I heard was a splash in the sea."

Per made off along the shore, till the sheer cliff stopped him; Jens followed with his hands in his pockets. "Nothing to see—not so much as a bubble," said Jens.

The sea lay just as usual at sunrise, grey and rippled and unconcerned. He was as you chose to take him: lively, when he was on the move, had nothing to say to any man; salt he was, but never ill-natured. You could hear the morning breeze coming up the fiord, with a hum and a murmur like a crowd of young people. The land awoke, came to life with sunshine and shadow, and gave itself over to the day.

"Hm! Seems as if he must have sunk," said Per.

"So he has. Sunk like any stone. He'll come up again in the dog-days."

"And I—I heard it whisper to me!" Per muttered the last words to himself.

They went home.

"You look to me as if you'd lost your tail," sneered Jens; "do you feel bad after your run? Ah, but it's a grand thing, lad, to feel you're a free man, a free-mason, and do just as you please. The old fellows, they ought to be here to see. Oh no, there's danger in the Juvik giant, when he takes it into his head to stir! Father—ay, you know, he wasn't one to knuckle down. But there was no *life* in him. Ha ha! that thief, my boy, he ran just—like—this!"

"Ah well. In God's name, it's done now and can't be undone." Per wiped the sweat from his forehead and neck.

Valborg was up when they came in, and Anders too.—What happened, did they get him?

Oh ay, they had him hunted. It was Per who answered her, and he was quick to do it. Jens made a face, slung his cap on the floor, and asked for a drink of whey.

"Did you kill him? Eh?" Anders turned to Jens: "Answer me, uncle, won't you?—did you kill him?"

"No, he—shut your mouth, you young snot!"

5

Valborg wondered greatly who it could be, and so did the other women. But after a while it was all the same

to them; he was not likely to come again just yet—the men had taught him a lesson.

Valborg had so many other things to think about. First of all there was the housekeeping, Juvik was a tidy load to have on one's shoulders; and then there was one of the maids, Daaret; the Lord knew what was wrong with her. For something was wrong. Thinner and thinner in the face, and bigger and bigger elsewhere, and so quiet and silent always, nothing *to* her any more. One had to think well before one spoke about a thing like that. She durstn't say a word of it to Per; she wouldn't be the one to deal him such a blow.

Then there was talk of that Morten Aune. He'd had a mischance; had gone down in the bog one night. They didn't find him—nothing was ever found that was lost there. One after another came with a tale that they'd had a warning of it. The neighbourhood was overrun with superstitious gossip. The vixen had been coughing and barking night after night on the hill above the quagmire; and just before, two cows had cast their calves. An old bedridden body who lay awake of nights had heard cries from across the bog last winter; and the raven, that bird of ill omen, had sat on the mountain side and said rah! most every blessed day. And the evening before, or the same evening it happened, the sky had had such an uncanny look, worse than they'd

ever seen it: blue-green and yellow in a fleckered sheen, and at last it had changed to a fiery furnace with white corpses leaping and dancing in it—he could never have made away with himself, poor soul? For he might have had some cause for that too, if once the evil powers had got him in their clutches. But *they* had taken it for a warning of warfare and bloodshed. But worst of all was that about the Black Rock.

"The Black Rock?" said Jens, and Per glanced up hastily.

Bless us, yes, hadn't they heard of it? One night when some folk were rowing off the shore, there was a white one standing up on the rock; they couldn't believe their eyes, though they were two men in the boat; but then he began to move, waving his arms at them and trying to tell them something; they pulled away as fast as they could, and the last they saw was that he threw himself head first into the sea—it was one who didn't lie in Christian ground.

Jens gave Per a nudge; this was fun. Valborg saw it, but thought he was just making game of their superstitious nonsense.

"Well, well, never mind," he said; "such things have happened before."

"Oh ay, but it's nothing to laugh at," she said; she could hear herself how her voice shook.

She had to have it out with Per, when they were alone that evening:

"Surely it couldn't have been—"

"—Morten who was the thief? Ay, you can take your oath to that!"

"You must be out of your wits, aren't you?" She lay deep in thought.—"Ay, ay," she said after a while; "we'll have to make the best of it; it can't be undone. But did he really jump into the sea? Well, then it was his own doing; so he's the one that must answer for it."

"Ay," said Per, turning over.

But Anders had lain awake listening.

"Then did you kill him after all?" he asked, sitting up in bed, wide awake.

No, no, said his mother—it wasn't that way, it was like this. She did her best to talk him round, and he lay listening, silent and incredulous. He asked no more. . . .

But then there was still that about the girl. Valborg took her out one day to help weed the meadow; it was a job one had to see to oneself, if it was to be *done*. They were down the slope, and nobody was by. Valborg leaned on her rake and looked at her.

"Is it Jens?" she asked, all of a sudden. For there was no other way to go at it.

It was almost as if she had knocked the girl's feet

from under her. Yes, she answered, it was he. And now she was glad it was out at last. Oh yes, it was Jens, she repeated.

"Isn't there a scrap of shame in you? That you come here and bring disgrace on the whole of Juvik?"

"It wasn't my choosing," the girl whimpered. "But what could I do?"

Valborg had to cut her short. Did they think of getting married now? she asked.

Yes, they had some thoughts of that. "Before the haymaking, we were thinking."

Was she as crazy as that for him? For *Jens?*

Crazy for him? No, it wasn't so bad as all that. The girl was fast recovering her spirits, and Valborg felt more and more uncomfortable.—No, it was all she would do to take him, he was so horrid to have messing you, for he hardly ever shaved. And he couldn't be much of a man either, to go with her, a maid on the farm—no, she would just barely take him. But he had been kind to her, ever so kind, and then he was one of those you couldn't get away from. And now—wasn't it too late to turn back? The girl cast her eyes down.

Valborg turned red. She cleared her throat, and her eyes were hard. She was ready to turn the wench away on the spot.

But Daaret looked her mistress frankly in the face; they were equals now, they two:

"Besides, it'll be better than being in service all your days. And better than having to marry a crofter."

Valborg was beaten again. She went back to her work. Her face was burning and her hands trembled. This was the dirtiest mess she had ever walked into.

Daaret took up her rake too. She was a bonny wench, no wonder the men ran after her; she was pretty even now, Valborg could see that as she worked; the little fool was dangerous enough, and Jens was Jens.

And the worst of it was, she was so stupid: she would believe anything they told her! Nobody could knock any sense into her.

No, that wasn't the worst thing either. Valborg felt it all day long, like a pain in her chest: she was wily as a serpent with it all. She could fool a man like Jens even.

She had to tell Per about it that evening. Did he know how it was with Daaret?

No, he didn't.

Well, it was this way, Valborg told him. "And now she thinks she'll be mistress here?"

It almost seemed as if Per hadn't heard what she said. She said it once more: "She thinks she'll be mistress here?"

"Well, let her, in God's name!" He looked down at his fists and yawned.

"Heh?"

No, he didn't say anything.

"Ay, but it shan't be, so long as the sun's above us! You may as well know it!"

She was white as a sheet, and her lips trembled.

"No, no," he said, and then he got up and went out, had to see to the horses.

CHAPTER VI

THE FARM CASTS ITS SKIN

1

JUVIK FARM LIES FACING THE FIORD ON THE EAST, WITH a steep slope below it; on the north side is an abrupt fir-clad height, and then the fields; southward, beyond the beck, there are birch-woods and meadows, marsh and rocks, one after the other, and then the mountains; bogs to the west, all the way to the crofts and the sea. Round about the houses it is fine and level, better than any other farm in the parish. Eastward the fiord lies open, sparkling and grateful in fine weather, and when a gale blows, you can stand sheltered up at Juvik and listen to it and see how wild and white it can be.—If you come by sea to Juvik, the farm sits there and takes no notice of you, sits there taken up with itself. There is a note about it, the Juvik folk always thought, a fine, deep note that comes from the woods and the fields and from the houses themselves. The old house was low and grey, with only one eye to look at you, an old home, too old to die; the new house was high and strong, with

many windows, a real Juviking, that strangers were shy to face; and the rest of the houses were big and firm and of the same mind: This is Juvik; if you have any business here, come on with it.

So it had seemed to Valborg, when she came here for the first time, and she never forgot it. It kept her up, at all times, it cooled her and calmed her when there was need. And she would have the others feel the same, no matter who they were.

"We'll have to keep our ears open now," she said to Per one day.

"Pooh!" He scouted it. One mustn't let such things get a hold of one. It was lies all through. They hadn't heard a thing—either at the Black Rock or anywhere else!

She couldn't help looking at him: he was like a man who was ill for want of sleep.—The Black Rock, ay, that was another story.

Did she believe it then?

Believe it? No, she didn't do that; it wasn't true, she had heard so many tales among the neighbours. No, it was Juvik she was thinking about. That there they were, and there they were going to stay. "And you hear the same, Per, don't you?"

And Per heard it. He heard it wherever he went. Ay, he said absently. That was all true enough. But

now it seemed to have gone to pieces somehow, the clapper had dropped out of the bell, hadn't she noticed that? It couldn't make much difference now what they did with themselves.

Valborg had noticed it. And she had been outspoken with Per lately, was forced into it, and she hadn't minced matters.—"I dare say," she said. "But it's for you to set it going again, Per; you and no one else. Oh yes, there's that about Jens; but we'll have to do something about that too."

"Jens, you say. But we were both in it, one as much as the other."

"Eh? Oh, you mean that wretched thief who jumped into the sea? But you know very well there's a worse thing than that—he's thinking of marrying her."

"I know," said Per, and tried to get away.

"Well, but—you don't *mean* it, do you?"

"Mean what?"

"To let him marry Daaret?"

All the same, Valborg had to take a look at Per. So worn-out she had never seen him. There had been times when she had wished him to be like that, so that she might be *good* to him. But now all she said was:

"You're not out of your senses, Per? You can pull yourself together, can't you?"

He blinked his eyes and passed his tongue along his

teeth, as though he had an answer somewhere there.

"Eh?" Valborg was almost speechless; what was there left to do? She flushed to the roots of her hair. "I tell you once for all, Per—if that happens I'll not stay here another day!"

"No?" He seemed to come to life. "Well, you know —we might just as well leave here, mightn't we? Ay, for Juvik—er—it's not more than big enough for one."

"So that's it. That's how it is. Well, then—"

He was holding a little hammer in his hand, had been looking at it a long time. Now he looked up at her, with a changed face, awake and lively; and at the sight of it Valborg lost her head, as she had always done before; it was no light matter to stand here arguing with Per!

"Juvik—there's nothing left to turn one's hand to at Juvik. They've put it all to rights before our time, land and houses and everything else, there's not a scrap more to do."

"No, but—it's Juvik!" Valborg could find no more to say, and so she left him.

But it worked within her. She didn't heed her little boy, who was hanging about her asking for a bite of food, and she forgot to answer when they spoke to her, just opened her mouth and let the answer wait.

Valborg came of the Engdal folk, and they were a hardy race—she didn't even care to show Per how

strong she was. There were a good many things she didn't care to show him, for you could never tell how he would take it. But today she laid hold of anything she could find, and just *lifted* it; she carried the wash-tub full of water across the kitchen, so that the maids stared open-mouthed at her. It struck her that if Per was so mad as to want to run away from his home, then in God's name she'd have to *hold* him!—A Juviking he might be, but just you wait!

"So maybe you think 'twas only the farm that brought me here," she said to herself. "You can think what you like about that. You can think what you like, Per, but now I'll tell you—"

Valborg came upon Jens out in the yard, he was just taking out the horse. She didn't look at him, never did if she could help it, but she thought he was fleering behind her back. Next day he passed close to her, while she was in the field laying out linen to bleach. "What can he be nosing after?" she wondered.

He stopped; he looked at her with such unfeigned surprise: was she doing all the work by herself? Where was Daaret, wasn't she lending a hand? Oh no, maybe she wasn't up to that. Valborg went on with her work, and then he laughed: "He he, she's getting so big, is Daaret, haven't you noticed that? Looks as if there'd soon be a wedding in the house—maybe you've guessed

that already? But, Valborg, I say! He he, you'll have to help this poor wife of mine a bit; just at first, eh? You'll have to make a decent housewife of her. Since you two are going to pull together."

Valborg straightened herself, put her hand to her back—it pained her—then took her basket and went. Jens saw that her face was flecked with red.—"That's done it," he said to himself.—"Now you can just stay there," she thought.—"All the same, I'll have to talk to him," she said, and set down her basket again. She looked him well up and down.

He didn't really mean it, did he? That he was going to marry one of the *maids?*

Oh, he meant it right enough. If one's been fishing in the water-butt, you know.

"You garbage!" She was so angry that the tears came into her eyes.

"Daaret's not to be sneezed at, I tell you. She does all she's asked to do. And much, much more! And pretty enough—she's not much uglier than other folk."

"Well, one thing's sure: if you do that, we shall clear out!"

"Hm-hm-hm! No, no, no!"

He tried to coax her like a child, he was so queer she almost had to laugh. She tossed her head and left him.

She was snorting, Jens could hear; she puffed him

out like a bad smell. Oh, it was a sad shame Per wasn't a real man, then he could have paid her out, that would have been a sight to see! For she was a jewel of a woman!

Valborg felt as if she must go round to every one of them and ask: Were they crazy already, or were they going that way?—Was Juvik nothing to them? Wasn't there a single one the farm could depend on but herself?

She said it to Per that night after they had gone to bed, for she couldn't sleep a wink: "It's the maddest thing I ever heard. To turn your back on your forefathers' farm and leave it for cattle to stray over—has anyone ever done the like? Run away and never care a straw!"

Per made no answer, and she grasped at the strongest weapon she had:

"What do you think your father would have said to such goings-on, if he'd been alive? Have you thought about that, Per?"

She was just falling off to sleep, when Per started up in bed.

"The Black Rock!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, kiss the cat!"

She turned her back to him, and he lay down again and shammed sleep.

A grown-up man who lay in bed and didn't go to

sleep, that was the most aggravating thing she knew of. Now he sat up again, muttering to himself:

"There isn't a dog anywhere about, is there?"

"Who cares if there is!" Soon after she added, and now her voice was gentler: "It's a sheep above in the field, can't you hear that?"

2

In the dog-days it all floats up again, what the sea has taken. And then Morten Aune came up too. They found him on the beach south of the Black Rock, two young lads who had rowed out after coal-fish one night. There he lay among the seaweed, a dead man, a sea corpse; they knew him by his clothes, for he had on a blue jacket and a red woollen scarf round his neck; it made them sick and they got away quickly. They went to Juvik and told the womenfolk, and they told the men.—They heard all sorts of foolish tales, said Jens. Per said nothing.

After supper Jens rowed out after coal-fish; he did that now and then. Valborg kept an eye on Per. Just so, about midnight he stole out and was gone. Pleasant journey! she thought.—They came back together, towards morning. "Now perhaps we'll get some peace," she said to herself.

Next day folk were out searching, they went all along

the shore to the southward, but saw nothing unusual. The lads must have been talking nonsense, they had given themselves a scare over nothing. Morten had been sucked down into the bog right enough.

That day Per rowed across the fiord to Haaberg; he wanted a talk with Ane.

At Haaberg things took their usual course, and it was a crooked one. The farm was big, but the work done on it was small; it looked as if everything on the place was waiting for death. And the family had pretty nearly died out too, they were old and childless, the few that were left, so Ane was allowed to stay there in peace.

Per had a look round before he went in. There stood the houses, he couldn't help laughing at them, they were so ruinous; and the yard between was a sea of mud. And there you had the fields: sour, sour; rocks and swampy ground everywhere, bramble-bushes and fallow land and all kinds of barrenness. But such a boundless expanse, forest and meadow, timber to your heart's content; and good soil, no doubt, if the truth were told.

He took another turn, walking with a furrow between his brows; presently he brightened up and the deep blue look came into his eyes which the Juvikings always had when they were bent on anything.

"Oh ay," he kept saying. "Oh ay; with God's help and willing hands it'll do. And timber too, and graz-

ing"—he stood on the Knoll and looked round—"there's a good living to be made here. And handy for the water. And peat, peat as far as you can see. And new land to clear, enough to keep you busy for a lifetime. Lord save us, what a huge place!"

Ane was not up to much. She made you think of a sick tree on a sour piece of ground. It was all sighing and sorrowing, everything was against her, farm and folk and all she set eyes on. She was getting old too—old, but not ugly.

Why didn't she marry again, he asked. She turned red at this, gave a start almost, but it was strange how much younger it made her.—Ah, should she that? She, an old widow, what was he thinking of?

Ho! when she had farm and land, and cash besides; she mustn't be so hard on herself!

Farm? No, child, the farm only frightened them away, kept folk from the house, that was what it did. For folk hadn't much sense, she could tell him.

No-o, there was some truth in that. But what about a widower? With a neat little farm of his own?—there were plenty like that.

Heh! she said—he was talking nonsense, but it was a treat to listen to it, she couldn't help smiling. She set about bringing him something to eat.

"Now look here, Ane, listen to me: what if I bought

the farm of you, eh?" He said it as he sat at table.

At this she only pulled a long face and looked foolish.

No, really, he was telling her the truth—this and nothing else was what brought him here today. For Juvik was no place for two, and they couldn't cut it up between them? What? No, not likely, but—

He talked her round and round, he was so lively and confident, she had never heard Per like this, or anyone else, for a long time. He talked of the family and he talked of his own concerns, till she could see nothing for it but to let him have the farm. He was quite frank: he told her about Jens and Daaret, and about Valborg, the price he had thought of paying and all, and before she knew where she was, he plunged into her affairs, showed her how the place was going to ruin, and she getting on in years; what she ought to do was to sell now and get a bit of money put by, and it was no trifle he offered her—four hundred dollars down! And leave him to talk to her husband's relations, he'd tackle them, he said, let them go to law and all the rest, if they had a mind to it.

Tackle them!—that was a word that took her fancy. They'd have to mind themselves with Per.

"Yes, or maybe I should treat them friendly? Then maybe you'd move out to Paalsness, to Andrias?"

She went red and hot at this, for Per must have seen

into her thoughts. This Andrias was a widower and a warm man, with grown-up children and a nice little farm and money besides; and then he was her husband's next heir.

"Then he'll get the money for Haaberg, so what will the others have to say? For there's not much life left in them; and then they'll have won, and you'll have won, and that will be the end and upshot," said Per, and thanked her for his meal.

When he left, the thing was as good as settled. There was only the question whether Ane was to have a pension, they hadn't discussed that; but there was no hurry about it, till they saw what would be needed.

It was a bright and boisterous day, sun and shadow raced each other over the land, over crag and bog and soft green forest; farms with their little grey houses showed up, smiling; now and again the Juvik shore came rowing towards one with its grassy slopes and fir-clad heights along the water's edge.

Per came home to Valborg with a bright look on his face, came and talked to her like a master, as in old days, told her what he had done. She was rather slow to take him up, he thought; it was not so easy to bring her round.

"No," he said, "I dare say it was too bad of me—not to tell you about it before I went."

Oh, that! No, that had never occurred to her—stuff and nonsense! But he saw that she blinked her eyes rather painfully as she turned away; she stood before him like a little girl. She looked about at all the things around her, as though they could give her back her strength. Then she turned to him, just like one in distress:

"Is Juvik nothing but an old coat to you, Per?" And hastily she added: "Ay, to me, you know, it won't make much difference—but what if your father had been alive?"

She left him at once; was on her way to the storehouse for meal and couldn't stop, the pot was just on the boil, she said.

Well, that was all right, as long as it didn't boil *over*. Per stood watching Valborg and forgot to take his eyes off her.—But he who has taken the Ugly Man on his back must carry him over the stream, he muttered. And now he had to go and look for Jens.

Jens was down at Skare, a croft by the shore, on the north side, only a step away. The folk of Skare were reckoned as only middling; Per didn't think much of them, a lazy, beggarly, foul-mouthed crew; but there Jens was, and not for the first time.

Per strolled down towards the sea. He thought he had never seen so fine a summer evening, valleys and

bogs pale blue with dew, and the meadows all in bloom, the long grass reached almost to his knees; now the evening shadows fell upon the slopes, upon sorrel and buttercups and white daisies, upon good and evil; there is such companionship in grass, whether it is growing in the meadow or lying in the hay-cart, Per had a feeling for it.—They were well off for fodder here at Juvik, and the corn didn't look badly either this year; presently the barley would be in ear, and then it was time to cut the hay; that was a good rule.

Oh ay, said Per, that was so. One was a free being, one went where one could. He looked at the eastern sky, it was so grand over the mountain ridge yonder, great golden-white clouds lay there shining at you, and the gulls were calling over the fiord. The mountains, they stand where they are, they know where they belong. But the clouds don't do that, they're always on the move, they go where they please and vary as the mood takes them.

But what had become of Jens! Wasn't he coming home to supper like other folk?

At last he came, and Per stepped aside into the field to take a look at the crop.

"Well, Jens, now I've gone and bought myself a farm. Can you guess which?"

Jens could not, but he was all impatience, wanted to know at once. Haaberg? That's it.—"Ah. But you know: *I* should have been the one to do it. For I'm more of a rover and a flit-about; and I shan't have anything tip-top in the way of a wife either, as far as I can see. So it was silly of you."

But he was the elder, said Per.

Jens never liked to hear that.—"Yes, I hear you say so," he said. "But now it's Valborg that's boss, she's such a stiff neck; ay, you know, she's a golden apple in your hand against Daaret; for Daaret, poor soul, she's not much more than a dolt and a dullard before the Lord."

"Be quiet with you! You don't mean to cry down your own wife, do you?" Per's face was all awry.

"As to that, I do as I please."

"Do you think they did so—our grandfather and—other decent folk?"

"Now you're at it again!—No, *they* didn't, they lived in the old days; the days when men increased and multiplied *on the earth,* as you know." He turned round to Per and laughed quietly and good-humouredly: So then he had to flit because Juvik was too small, eh? Oh no, my boy, then it would have been for another to flit. "Bide a wee, I'll tell you what it is: it's your Black Rock friend that's scared you away. If I'd looked after

myself properly, I could have had bogies for you all over the place. But I—almost thought we might both have got along here."

Per walked in silence for a while, considering with himself. Then he thought he had better say how it was:

"You may well say I'm scared. For I am. We killed him. But it isn't only that, Jens. I *must* get away. It seems as if they *want* me out of here and across the fiord."

"Who do?"

"Well, I don't know. But I can feel that's what they want."

He hadn't said the half of it. He had it all so clear, but it slipped away when he tried to come out with it. But he didn't care if they did think he was frightened. He had a firm foothold, it seemed to him: he was going to do what no Juviking had done before him. It had grown up within him so quietly, all the time he had been weak and downhearted. They *talked* to him.

"Who knows?" sneered Jens; "we might be leaving here the same day, you and I, Per."

3

Per took it as a joke, and thought no more of it. Perhaps Jens did not mean much by it either, but his words were soon to come true.

At present there was the haymaking, and it went slowly; there was no drying it this year, nothing but rain and rot; and yet they might thank their stars, for worse times were predicted, there was talk of war and famine, the sky was full of evil omens. The Juvik men made light of this and went ahead with the hay as well as they could; and at last they had it carted, such as it was.

"You're not in such an almighty hurry to move, are you?" asked Jens one day, when they had just eaten their haymaking porridge.—"Oh, it's best to make a start with it, a bit at a time. That's what Ane wants."—"There's this wedding business, you see." Jens tried to make a joke of it, but didn't succeed very well. "It might be more—pleasant if you two stayed here for that."—"Well, then let it be soon," said Per. For it was so queer to see Jens at a loss like this.—"There's nothing else for it. A man looks a fool with a bride in the straw, you know that saying?"

Per left him silently. There dawned on him a thing he had never thought of before: that Jens *was* like this, and he couldn't be different; he was scarcely happier than other folk.

So there was a wedding at Juvik, with dancing and jollity, and they got it over in three or four days. Per could not put off his flitting any longer; and it looked

as if the young people thought more of the meals than the dancing; they were getting sadly unused to a good feed. They were feeling the pinch in the farms around.

Then came the flitting. It was no very long job, for they hadn't much gear to take with them. They were to leave behind what belonged to Juvik and take over Haaberg with what was in it. The farm at home had been left to the boys as it stood, while the girls got the cash and a cow each from the byre; now Jens paid out his brother with two hundred silver dollars, and the half of that Per had to borrow east in Engdal; he wanted the money to pay for Haaberg, and Jens thought Per could get it easier than he.

"Seems to me it's going to bring us all to beggary, this here," said Jens. He said it so that Valborg might hear, and he had the satisfaction of seeing that she took it to heart; her face grew hard, a sort of blight came over this jewel of Per's, it did one good to see it. But Per held up his head and smiled down on him: that was how Jens was made and he'd never be different; as bad as a draughty door, poor man, but a right good fellow all the same; many a merry day they'd had together.

They had fine weather for the flitting, dead calm and sunshine; Jens rowed across with them. There was no real leave-taking, with Juvik and the folk there, for they

had one thing and another to come back for; Per was to fetch the colt he had bought one day, and Valborg found she had forgotten her spinning-wheels and weaver's reeds and other little things.

But Valborg looked back furtively. She ought not to have done that, it was not a good sign exactly, but as she sat in the boat, there was nowhere else for her eyes.

Juvik turned away from her and was gone.

"Now we can't see our home any more," said Anders; he too was gazing backward, and he was very long in the face.

"Yes, but it's fun to be taken out for a row, isn't it?" said Valborg.

There happened to be other signs that did not augur well. Valborg saw them and Per saw them, but nobody heeded such things nowadays, that time was past and gone.

"Thanks for your help," said Per to Jens.

"Put it on the stone there. So you'll come across for the colt before the holidays?"

"Ay, what day is today?"

"Today's *Wednesday*, and tomorrow will be *Thursday*"—Jens pushed off the boat and jumped into it. "Ah, I was forgetting"—and he spat out a curse, which he had been told was not a bad thing to do.

Per was across the fiord a couple of times, but only on a flying visit; Valborg was not with him, he looked after her things for her.

And then there was not much time to think of that any more. At Haaberg a thousand things awaited them. First Per had to get on to the roof, for it was letting in water in streams; then to saw planks and lay the stable floor, and at odd times, when he was resting, as he called it, there was stone to be quarried on the Knoll for paving the farm-yard, if they were not to be swallowed up alive. Valborg took to washing, and that was cheerful work, for here you could see something for it.

Per's eyes dwelt on the wet and stony ground whenever he straightened himself, and they grew sharp and full of fight: he'd make a farm of it in time!—Valborg put her hands on her hips, and her head on one side: if they had a proper floor, and a kitchen over there, partitioned off, and another window, and a stove—

Now and again she would watch Per, and then dimples came in her cheeks: "I believe it's made a new man of him!"

He took no notice of Valborg, otherwise he must have said the same of her.

Ane was always in and out. She was to have a pension, a thumping big one, and the outer room, as they called it, was to be got ready for her when there was

time. She was a little peevish and inclined to make trouble, but Per put a queer life into her when he discoursed about marriage.

He actually found a pretext for going east to Paalsness, more than once. He had to borrow money, it seemed, and that was the place to get it. And one day Andrias came to Haaberg. Per was the one he asked for, but Ane was the one he found, and with Ane he had a talk. He was a lively old fellow, looked as if he'd like to dance, thought Ane, and young too, she thought. Ane didn't look bad either, when she chose.—By the time Andrias found Per he was able to tell him that they had made it up between them, he and she; they were going to row in the same boat, and as to which of them was to sit aft, they'd have to fight that out when they were by themselves. "I only hope we're not going to have a Thirty Years' War over it," said he.

It took its time, but before Christmas Ane moved east. and they made a proper wedding of it.

Jens Juvika got drunk, but that didn't matter so much, for he did a worse thing: he started singing for them, one song after another; and the worst was, he had made them up himself! "I don't get merry oftener than other folk," he said, "but when I do, I *sing!*" He had a good voice, and his songs went to such fine tunes; no matter

how scandalized they were, they had to listen to him. For the worst of it was, he was not brim-full either.

In the course of the night he came blathering up to Per, among all the crowd, laid a hand on his shoulder, and said this was the last time he'd make him feel hot, the last time they two would roast each other like friends and brothers. And now Per was to drink when he asked him, for old brotherhood's sake— "Drink, do you hear, you puppy, what are you listening for now? Are you afraid, are you *frightened,* brother of mine?"

Per felt what was coming and asked him out, then they'd have a thimbleful by themselves.—Jens was softened at this and came, but it splashed out of him on the way: "We two—we're not afraid of the dark, are we? The Black Rock's black, but we're blacker; do you remember last spring, Per, how we ran, like two frisky calves, and he in front of us?—Devil smite me, how he legged it, ha ha ha!"

Per got him round the corner and into the storehouse for fresh beer. But there his boldness left him; he took a swig or two and stared doubtfully at Per; his face was pale and drawn.

"What are you growling about? Isn't my old woman as good as yours? Even if father didn't pick her for me? Short in the wits, you say—pooh!" He looked down, thought for a bit before he got what he wanted;

then he muttered to himself: "Did I dream it, or did somebody tell me?—that the thing to back you at a pinch is the wit you haven't got and don't miss. *You* have wit enough to be sure, he he." He raised his head again: "Well, it's all one to me, as the girl said.—God save us, how disgusting you are, Per! A man of honour! Will it be long before the baby's born, you ask? I stand up just as straight, no matter where I lie. No matter when it's born. But the Black Rock, heh?"

Per left him.

4

Jens was kind to the servants, and to his wife too. All the same, the other maid gave notice when Daaret became the mistress; she was not going to serve under *her*. And they could get nobody to take her place. Aasel had to go and find them maids. Jens wouldn't settle down to anything—there was nothing more to be done at Juvik, he said, and so he took his gun and went off to the woods, stayed away till nightfall day after day. All night long he would sit down at Skare playing cards for money, or he might go farther than that. If he got drunk, he sang, one song worse than the other; they soon knew them all over the parish.

Just before Christmas—it was Thomas-mass Day—he had a daughter.

"Amen!" said Jens, when they told him.—A pretty little lass, they said.—"Amen!"—Would he like to see her? he could come now.—"No, no, what's the use of that?" He turned sharp round to the woman they had fetched in: "I suppose she's as like her father as two peas, what?"

The woman didn't like this and turned away. "Maybe it's too soon to see that," she said.

Jens had been in to breakfast, and now he was going out again. But first he was at the woman again: "What are you reckoning up, eh? January, February, March, you say. Ay, you're right there, you're a whole heap right. The youngster's a wee bit old already, eleven months and all of that. But what of it? It's nothing to me." He looked up at the ceiling with a sneer, and then he went out. To Daaret he said not a word.

And they all began to wonder: either the child was eleven months old when it came into the world, or they didn't know anything at all. But then she had fooled others besides Jens. And why was Jens always down at Skare of late?

That evening, as every other evening, Jens was at Skare. All at once, as they sat at cards, he grabbed the fist of Haagen, the elder of the boys, covered it with his big palm, squeezed it too, maybe, as hard as he could, for the lad clenched his teeth and turned pale;

Jens looked at him, as mild as milk: "Come up home with me, Haagen, we'll take a look at my little lassie. She's only a poor wee girlie, but she's a proper shape, and eleven months old. What? And so like me she is!" He had half risen. Then he sat down again and went on with the game. They were both on the alert, he could see, either to make for the door or to whip out their knives, if it came to a tussle.—"Ay," he said, looking round at them: "I might have had a mind to prune you a bit; but where's the profit?—do you think I'm a lousy cottar just because I sit here in your company?"

They played on till black night, and Jens stumbled home in the dark. He stood for a moment outside the old house, looked at the Pleiads, and considered: "Maybe I should light a fire and turn in here? Then the lousy cottar body could have the house to herself." But he only shrugged his shoulders, went up into the loft, and found a bed there. . . .

At Christmas-time folk did not go visiting. They just went to church, and the rest of the time they stayed at home and kept the feast. That custom was broken by none but Jens. He went straight from church to Haaberg, on Christmas Day itself, and there he stayed. Per and Valborg were a little taken aback when they saw him, but that only tickled Jens. He saw too how it galled Valborg that Daaret had fooled her. He kept

telling them again that he'd got a daughter, and that it was on Thomas-mass Day she was born. She couldn't make up her mind to come sooner, he said.

The next day they went east to Paalsness, both Per and Jens, and to other places after that; they enjoyed themselves up to the eyes.

At last one morning Jens was homeward bound, and Per went down with him to the shore. They were both rather the worse for wear.

As Jens stood in the boat, poling her out of the shoal water, he said:

"I'm for Lofoten this winter. So it's good-bye to you, Per."

Their eyes met, and Per turned pale.

"Eh, but—you've not gone daft, Jens?"

"Oh ay. That I have. I want to get away and shake myself, can't you guess that, you ass?"

He took his oars, turned the boat's head round, but did not begin to row.—"Good luck to you, Per, as long as you live! Anyway I'm glad there's as much man in me as there is. That I'm not a milksop like you. I eat my porridge even if it is weevily, that's how I am. And isn't it a queer thing how I can stick my hands in my pockets, to keep them from getting into mischief?" The boat had drifted in among the stones again, and now he had to row.

"Well, Per, thanks for all."

The strokes of his oars grated and groaned across the water, farther and farther away; it was like the voice of an angry man.

Per said nothing about this to Valborg.

And Jens did not tell his wife where he was going, until he was as good as gone. He had shipped aboard of a foreigner who came in to buy wood, and he got ready in all haste; he was to be nothing better than a hired seaman, as he had no Lofoten outfit. Daaret didn't dare to raise her eyes; she looked as if she had never expected anything else.

And then he had bargained with Haagen from Skare to come here and take charge of the place for the winter; what did she say to that?

The poor creature bent down to the floor after something, fumbled about, and didn't find it. "That'll be all right," she said.

Jens stayed awhile longer; he tried to stand in the middle of the room as if nothing concerned him, the way Per used to do. He worked his forehead up and down like an angry bear.—"That's it, then," was all he said. She'd have to look after Haagen properly and not forget he was as hungry as a wolf, that fellow. And, by the way, if anything went wrong she was to send for Aasel, for she was always the safest to turn to.

So *that* was over, thank God, and glad they were, both of them. He was already outside, when he came in once more, and nearly scared the wits out of her; she got behind the cradle and stood there; but he wanted nothing worse than to say good-bye and take her by the hand. Daaret couldn't make it out at all.

5

The winter went by, but it went with a heavy gait; a bad and stormy winter.

Its hand was heavy enough on Juvik, when the easterly gales set in; 'twas no treat for those who had to be out, they used to say.

At Haaberg it was much worse. There the wind came from every quarter, so searching and persistent, and so sharp of tooth; it devoured you, they said. Per declared it blew clean through him, no matter where he stood; it was an enemy that was trying to drive him out.

It was a blessing, though, that he had so much to do, and Valborg watched him and felt easier than she had done for a long time; to be sure, he would still stand wool-gathering now and again somewhere about the place, but never for long at a time; and he wasn't too much afraid of the dark either, as far as she could see, not enough to hurt him. He was the man she had taken him for.

At last the spring came, this year too. What's more, it came early to Haaberg, from the way the farm lay. The Knoll came out first, raising a grey, rocky face and looking up into the sky, then they came one after another, grey old fellows, stood and sunned themselves, without a thought or a threat in them; and the fields came after, bit by bit, in rags and tatters of a dirty grey; and now the bog was bare, its whole brown and barren face was clear, the birds flew over it and sang. The grey rock pushed away his mantle of mould, wanted to see where he was. The scent of growth caught at one's nostrils, tingled through body and soul.—The air was full of the haze of springtime, and all that one saw was blue with it.

Everything cast its skin, that had a skin to cast.

Per and Valborg sometimes went out in the evening and stood chatting about one thing or another, listening and looking about them. Sometimes Per was alone. Then one heard more. Then a voice of the night came whispering up from the sea, asking its endless question of the shore; it was the murmur of the surf. And the answer came from the land above, the spring night answered with a single voice: the roar of the torrent within the forest.

And the spring advanced, over Haaberg and the whole neighbourhood. The waters of spring leapt and gurgled

and laughed, the wind whistled in tearing gusts. Per ploughed and sowed, at sunrise he was in the fields, at midday and till late in the evening; the Haaberg land had never been put to it like this before; he thought it turned and stared at him like a chewing cow, giving a little friendly grunt now and again. The big stones might rest for another year, and the wet patches could wait awhile; but he was getting ready and he had his eye on them.

At Juvik it was not so well. Jens did not come home. His boat's crew sent word that he had gone farther north with a trader and they were to give his kindest greetings. They were altogether in a bad way at Juvik, and Per had to go over and put things straight.

But by that time Aasel was already there.—"Well, now you'll have to take over the farm," he said to her.—She?—"Just so, ay."—But what about him?—"No. We don't shift about like that. And you," he turned to Daaret, "you'll have to have a little pension, a cow and a little corn and whatever it may be; enough to keep you alive."—"Pension?"—"Ay, pension, I said. For you're not going to idle about here with that crofter fellow of yours from Skare, that didn't come to anything, you see. Your little girl we say nothing about—that's plain enough, isn't it?"—"Ay, ay," said Daaret,

and then she went to pieces, turned pale and blue at the same time; she couldn't meet his eyes.

Nor was there any standing up to Per that day. If it had been the King himself, he'd have got out of Per's way, they were thinking.

"The best way will be for you to move in here at once," he took Aasel aside again. "Your Mikkal is more of a seal than anything, but you shall have the farm for all that. Remember, that was how father wished it, he must have seen how it would be. The price and that—we'll talk about another time. Her there—we *won't* talk about."

Once again he came and took Aasel aside. He was so full of it all, she hardly knew him.—"I, do you say? No. I'm where I ought to be. For I had to get away. They wished it so. And, besides, one must move about a bit. Ay, and then there was Valborg. She was only vexing herself here and getting cross and ugly. She didn't want to leave here, no, but she had to! So that's all done with. And now you're the one who has the say at Juvik. You must be *at* yourself, Aasel!"

And so it was. Daaret was given the old house to live in, and enough to keep her, and Mikkal and Aasel took over the farm.

Per and Valborg were across to see them one Sunday.

Aasel showed big dimples in her cheeks, such as the Juvik women often had when they were pleased with themselves. Mikkal looked from one to the other, inquisitive and serious, and asked Per's advice about many things. Their children were all over the place, a whole herd of youngsters crawling and running about and making a noise: it was such grand fun here. And Per nodded: this was as it should be, Juvik wished it so.—"Now we must see about getting *home*," said Valborg; there were so many things waiting for them there.

"The question is," said Per as they rowed homewards, "whether it isn't so that the old places cast their skin now and again. They used to think that, the old fellows."

CHAPTER VII

"BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL!"

1

IT WAS GETTING ON FOR CHRISTMAS, TWO OR THREE years later. Per was crossing the farm-yard from the penthouse, where the boys were stacking peat. Valborg came out of the storehouse, where she had been for bread. A crofter wife stole round the corner with her bag, and Per saw it was empty.

Ay, said Valborg—but what was one to do? *She* didn't know what became of the corn and meal, but it went: they couldn't keep a thing. If the porridge meal lasted out the winter they might think themselves lucky. And what about seed-corn? Four bushels of barley, that wasn't much for Haaberg. But as for meal—

Oh—they'd have to miss a few spoonfuls this winter. There was no sense in eating one's fill every day, was there?

That was the usual way, when they talked to each other. They couldn't be serious or sensible any more, it seemed. They wondered at each other, but it was

just as if they were standing back to back, they never got to know anything.

Valborg went in. Per took a turn behind the byre, and there stood the woman with her bag.—"What's the matter with you?" he asked—"are you out of meal? Come on with your bag, quick." He tossed it out to her again, as though there was only a mite in it: "Here you are! Now away home with you."

Valborg was right: they were getting too many of that sort now, and the stores were shrinking badly; they'd have to say *no,* in all conscience! But Per didn't like it, it smacked of poverty. He laughed heartily when the little boys gave warning: "Here comes another with a bag!" and he was quite ready to set the dog on them before they reached the farm; but it was another story when once they were there. And it *was* hard times for the small men; hard enough for other folk.

The first summer Per and Valborg were at Haaberg they had the great frost year. May set in with blazing heat, so that the cattle were nearly maddened by the gad-fly. In the course of the summer it froze time after time, and worst of all at Haaberg.—"Well, there it is," was all Per said. "You don't pull down the barn for one bad year."—"As long as it's only one," said Valborg. "But isn't it strange that it should come just this

year?"—"Hm!" said Per, and then he turned away. He could turn away like this, so that it made you feel you weren't there. He didn't mean a scrap of harm by it. For Valborg was not one to make a howl. It was true, it had gone badly with her before now: she had twice had a miscarriage. The first time before they left Juvik—she had felt the move so sadly; the second time was this summer, and then it had nearly carried her off —it must have been a bad year in this too; it had been too dry. She took it as a warning, or whatever it might be.

And you must never expect too much of womenfolk when the food runs short, said Per to himself; and with that he put the matter aside and went back to his work. For he himself was not to be put out: here he was, and here he was going to stay; *they* would have it so. And here was a good place to be. "Here we have our job before us, stones and water enough to keep us busy for a hundred years," he would often say to Anders. And a rich and friendly soil, when once she got to know you.

Per was making himself a new sledge for carrying stones. But now he stopped to listen: the crofters were so lazy at their threshing today. One stroke today and another tomorrow, he laughed. He flung down his tools and went into the barn to let them see him. They had been let off their rent money the last two years, but that

hadn't made them any livelier, just; and work they *must*, he'd let them know who was the master.

At that moment Valborg came and asked him to go into the house: a stranger was there. Who? Oh, he'd soon see. She could tell by his face it was Jens he thought of. That often happened. But it was not Jens, it was *Brandy Mærit*. She was a woman who went from farm to farm distilling for folk, and at the same time she brought round the gossip. For a couple of years she had had nothing to do, they had hardly seen her; but today she slipped in and sat down as if she had been sent for.

She took a pinch of snuff and talked about the weather and the crops and much else. *There* they had had cattle sickness, whether it was Lapp *gann* or other ill work; *there* they looked to be starving to death. And this one was in a decline and would soon be done, ay, and another had brought up *blood!* But the worst of all was on the other side of the fiord, over by the Black Rock: there a white one had been seen and heard, crying out that he wanted to come into Christian ground. She sneezed and told her tales, till the whole room was full of grisliness: it was a black time, a strange dog slept under every bed almost.

Valborg was only half listening; she had heard all this before. But her heart misgave her badly, and she

had her eye on Per now and again. She couldn't make him out at all; he took in Mærit's tales so greedily. At last she could keep silence no longer: Had *he* bidden Mærit come here?

"To be sure!" he answered, but only in joke, and then he turned to Mærit and asked for more ghost stories.

Valborg went straight to the storehouse. And sure enough—the barley-bin was empty! Four bushels of barley they had taken, and now of course it was in the brewhouse, to be turned into Christmas brandy. She went in again. She didn't say a word.

And now the still was going; Mærit distilled, and Mærit cleared, all as quietly as a magic spell, and then they had the brandy there, the clear and fiery drink. "Now I've cleared it, and now *I'm* clear," she said, and with that she dropped into a corner and slept like a stone. She was as full as a vat. Mærit never tasted a drop of her own brewing, according to herself; one can get full on less than that, she said, and folk thought that fair enough.

It was late at night, and soon every soul in the house was asleep. Only Per was still up.

Outside it was a cold, clear night. The Pleiads twinkled over the roof of the barn; the moon threw blue shadows on the snow behind the houses; north and south and wherever one looked there was moon-

light and shadow and clear sky. In such semblance the night would come before one: a great, calm face, two great eyes. When they were upon one it was a small thing to be a man. What was it they saw?

It was a dim little pane he was looking through. He put his hands behind his neck and stood thus. He was not thinking, he hardly ever did that any more. For the man who sells himself to thinking sells himself to an evil power. He simply stood there. He wondered, though, if he hadn't a mind to brace himself with a drop of drink and then go out and shake them all up —a Juviking would do that, and he was one.

Then he noticed that Valborg was lying awake in the bed. He stretched himself, yawned, and looked into the corner where Mærit lay—how was he to get her out of this?

"And now I've cleared it, and now *I'm* clear," he said. "Ay ay, we made a whole lot."

"You're standing there like Johnny Head-in-air, aren't you?" said Valborg.

He turned round to her, screwing up his eyes quizzically, as one sometimes does at a child: Was she afraid for him? That he should break out and go on the drink at Christmas?

To that she made no answer.

"Or is it the corn that's keeping you awake? That's

more like it. What if you let the corn go to blazes, the same as I do? You'll see how light-hearted you'll be."

"But that you should go and do a thing like that. That's what I can't get over."

He turned half round to Mærit again. "Look at her there," he said merrily. "*She's* not lying awake. Ugly, ay! The Lord's been pretty close-fisted with her; but she doesn't seem to think that's her affair, it's worse for them that have to look at her. Shall I take and carry her up to the loft?—What if a black dog came and sniffed at her, eh? Then she'd be *clear.*"

"I believe—I believe you're drunk too, aren't you?"

"Oh no." Now he crossed the room to the bed. She saw he was quite sober.

"I know, Per, I know. You're just the same as you always were. No matter what you do."

He stared at her. All at once the room seemed to go round with him; could he be drunk after all?

"What's the matter now?"

Valborg struggled hard with it. Till now she had known nothing at all about Per, and then *that* had been such a great thing. Now she seemed to know everything about him, and now *this* was the greatest thing she had.

"No, it wasn't anything special exactly. Only it

struck me so—that we have something *against* us?"

She gave him a frightened glance and looked away again; she could not believe she had really said it.

He began to undress.—"Go to sleep now, wife," he said. She said no more, and there was silence in the room; no other sound than Mærit, snoring away in her corner by the stove. The fire was going out, and the candle guttered and flickered, soon it would be out too. The moon threw pale green patches on the wall.—"Ay," said Per—he had been sitting awhile on the edge of the bed, and now he felt how still it was—what might be the truth of it he didn't know.—"But here we're going to stay, that I do know. No matter who planted us here. No matter who he may be."

Now the candle went out; Per pinched the wick, and then he went to the water-tub and drank.

You could hear the sighing of the fiord, when you listened; it lay in the moonlight, beset by the land and the cold. An icy air went through the room. Per rallied her with a smile:

"But look, you're not the same woman since we left Juvik. You'd give up all just for that!"

"Nonsense! I know you did right in that, Per. But I'm thinking of one thing. And you're thinking of the same."

"Heh? What's that?"

"And Lord knows—what harm it may bring us."

"Oh, kiss the cat! Is it Morten Aune? Tomorrow night I'll take my gun and go across and shoot him."

She said nothing for a moment, and then it came, and from deep within her, he could hear:

"You're not to say such things. You're no Juviking, Per, after all. And you were never meant to be, either."

He felt shamed for the moment, but then he laughed and crept under the bed-clothes:

"Mercy on us! How you do open your heart!"

He muttered it once more, to himself, and yawned again: "Open your heart as wide as a lion's jaw."

"The parson ought to be able to do something for it," she said. "For if we're to suffer for it all our days, why—"

"There, now you can drop it!"

2

Twice in the course of the winter Per rowed over to Valvær,[1] but came home empty-handed. He did not say what business he had there, nor did anyone ask him. When spring was coming on he was there again, and this time he brought back two sacks of Bergen corn.

He just stood and looked at Valborg a moment, and

[1] A *vær* is a fishing-station.

she didn't know if he was talking to her or only to himself, but anyhow she agreed with him: they should have some, those who were in need. They came creeping up day after day with their empty sacks, trying to find Valborg, and Per was right, they looked so lamentable shuffling off home again without a scrap. It was never long before the boys would be crying: "Here comes another bag-woman!"

"What do you think we're going to sow this year?" Valborg was wondering as she ladled out the porridge one day. She was not far from saying it aloud. The farm-servants were sitting at the table.

"Ah, the Lord only knows!" said Per all at once. He had said grace and was on his way out.

Valborg turned hot, for he must have read what was on the tip of her tongue.

"At Juvik they still have heaps of corn, I'm told." She said this next day, when she came to the stable door for a pail, and Per stood there mending a harness. She did not expect an answer, and none came either.

That day Per drove east to Paalsness and bought two bushels of seed-corn. Ane measured it out to him and full measure she gave: the Haaberg land was to have all that, she told him. "Ay, that it shall," muttered Per, "even if there's a whole row of begging women standing by." And when he came home he took the

bag over his shoulder and went to work as if he had stolen it.

The same day Aasel came rowing across the fiord by herself. It was Valborg she wanted.

"You'll have to come down to the beach," was all she said.

Valborg took off her apron, put on her clogs, and came.

No, said Aasel, she'd have to put on shoes this time—the laughter was twitching at the corners of her eyes and mouth. Valborg did so, and then they went off. In the boat lay two sacks of corn.—"But somebody's been at it," said Aasel, letting her eyes stray up to the crofts. "Ah, well; they pilfer and pluck, a bit here and a bit there, as father used to say.

"You take one and I'll take the other!" she gave Valborg a merry look.

"Here goes!" and with that she took the sack on her shoulders and went off, Aasel after with hers.

There were two bushels in each, and the road was long and stony; Haaberg kept moving farther and farther away, but at last they had them up to the storehouse.

"Blest if I don't think there's two more bag-women coming!" said Petter, the smaller boy, plucking at his father.

Per glanced down the road for a second and turned back to his work.

"Now we'll steep the seed-corn straight away," said Aasel.

"I dare say that'll be safest." Valborg gave a little laugh, on one side of her face. They stood getting their breath after the effort and looked at each other: a pretty sound pair, weren't they? Valborg's eyes twinkled:

"Won't he pull a long face, your old man, when he finds there's been a thief at the corn-bin."

"Not likely. His face is too round for that. And he's too easy. As for that—why, Mikkal—"

Valborg laughed. She had a loud and hearty laugh when she chose to use it; you thought of a clear stream of water when she laughed. But she was serious again directly: It was what she had always said, you jogged along from day to day.

"There was something I wanted to talk to you about," said Aasel, as she was leaving. "But it'll have to wait till another time."

Valborg flushed slightly: perhaps she knew what it was. For there were many things they ought to talk about.

"But deliver us from evil!" she would say for her part. And that might carry you over the day.

She said the same to Per that evening. "From *evil*, ay," he laughed; "well, you ought to say that twice; then maybe it'll carry you over two days."

The soil got the corn it wanted, and with that much else was as it should be. It was a marvel how it sprouted. "Black is the soil, and she means me well," said Per. "And just you wait till I've had time to turn round."

He had an old oddity on the farm, named Steffen, a legacy from Ane; Steffen Big-Shoes his rascally boys called him, for he had such big feet—they declared they had bespoken his big toe-nails to make into horn spoons. He was a faithful worker, and Per fell to talking with him now and again, quite naturally; there were not many the old man cared to speak to.—"We'll make a farm of Haaberg, Steffen," he said to him.—"Haaberg *is* a farm," growled the other.—"When we've shifted the big stone there, and got rid of the water."—"Ah, I'm not so sure."—"Why not?"—"He's an old hand here, that stone. Before your time."—"Ay, but he's not going to be much older, above ground. He's coming down, he is."—"Don't you touch him, child. Don't you touch him. Mark what I say!"

Per was amused at this. The more one talked with folk, the more one grew over their heads.

He came back to this chat several times that summer, but Steffen was not to be moved. That stone, what

harm had he done? And the water? Hadn't they any rights nowadays, these things? "We'll have a fine harvest at Haaberg *this year*. We will that. But—can you tell what next year will bring you, eh?"

"Superstitious nonsense," scoffed Per.—"Ay, maybe, maybe not—it's an old world this. There's Iver Brudal, look at him now."—"What about him?"—"Oh, nothing. Only that he got under a stone. Ay. The stone sucked him under—and it wasn't any pebble that *he* tried to shift. They dug him out half dead. He's learnt now to leave a thing or two in peace. 'Peace on earth,' it says. Said so in old parson's time anyway."

Per laughed. He laughed rarely, but he had a good laugh at Steffen and his stones, scouted them well; and it put heart into him. He had often had a feeling that he was rowing alone in the dark, he couldn't deny it, and he had been scared away from Juvik as if a whole flock of black-winged birds were after him. But when he came to think, it was incredible what a fair-haired and unbelieving Juviking he had made of himself again. And even if Jens had been here—but never mind that, nobody missed *him* any more.—"It's easy enough, Steffen, when you have your enemy right in front of you like that; when you can look him in the face. And at a pinch, you know, you can say like the womenfolk —like the folk here round about the church: 'But deliver

us from evil!' they say; *that* ought to help a bit, oughtn't it?" But Steffen was surly and glum, and it took Per a long time to coax him back into a good humour. The only thing was, it gave one such a fresh taste in the mouth to rub a fellow-creature the wrong way now and again.

And then he had these boys of his about him. They wouldn't behave themselves. "It's eating and beating with them all the time," sighed Valborg; "and then you get nothing but sauce and contrariness."—"Ah, but here's birch-twigs enough," said Per; "and you've got to have somebody to work off your temper on." But he was often moody: what would become of them? what was there in them? All the same, they made him happy. He was no longer alone.

One night when he was down at the store and had been given a drink, he shook his fist at the roof-beams:

"Heh, boy! It'll take something to make me pray like the womenfolk!"

3

Per stood watching Steffen Big-Shoes and the other farm-hand covering in the drain. This was a new fashion in those parts; they had had nothing but open drains till now. Steffen came from the south, and he knew how it should be done. He felt like a real craftsman over

this, wouldn't even notice the master today; the lad offered him stone after stone, but not a bit of it! 'twas never the right one: "Those two for the sides and that one on top; that's the way we do it in the south!"

Per looked at him, in calm self-confidence. Steffen's head was small and round, with black hair; forehead there was not much of, but the lower part of his face was big and bony: the eyes small and feeble, but full of wisdom when they were sorting out stones; his back was made for slavery. Per looked closely at his legs: they were short and crooked, with long, flat feet—that fellow could never run very fast. Per looked at his own, went over his whole frame. He could still jump his own height, he could run races with his horse; could hunt folk into the sea, if it came to that, he said to himself with a smile.

Now he went away, to his own job. He was at work on the big stone farther down the field. As he walked he raised his eyes and looked around with such a high heart: this was what he had been looking forward to all his days; it was for this he had come here. It did not occur to him that he had had his doubts now and again; that was Valborg and she had time to believe what she liked.

It was harvest already, and the corn was in stooks; the first clear evenings had come. Fine weather this was

and no mistake. The land to the southward changed its shape as he looked at it, hills and mountains came to meet him, glens and crags stood out in light and shade, and all that was farther off vanished away, far into the sky and the evening; the land parted asunder before him. And the moon was already up, the pools sparkled gaily with a cold glitter; presently it would freeze. Let it freeze, he muttered, hunching his shoulders contentedly, as a man does when he feels well.

Here was the fellow he wanted. He had already dug the pit for him. The stone had waked up, as it were, was getting uneasy. He had tufts of beard all over his face and was full of little eyes. Now Per could hear his voice, a hoary, moss-grown voice like Steffen's, muttering at him: "There's room for all sorts in a fellow like me." Per was ready to believe it. Likely enough the little people had their home here, and now he was going to wreck it for them; he had seen one of them here last year, he ran from that stone over there to the heap of stones at the bottom of the field, ran like mad, so that his sheath-knife wagged up and down behind him. Per thrust his crowbar right in the face of the stone: "Huff, boy!" Then he jumped into the hole and began to dig. It was a bit risky, for the pit was deep and narrow, and of course the stone was only watching its chance. Per made himself a sort of stairway in the

farther wall, so if the pixies took it into their heads to roll the stone down too soon, they wouldn't gain much by it.

He gave a little start on finding there was someone by. It was only Anders, who had come and wanted to help. He often came like that, with spade or pick, though he was really a mother's child and hung about the house. "Here comes Lame Andrias," the boy announced. Per looked up and about, and sure enough, there he came.

Lame Andrias was a half-Lapp, and married to a Lapp wench, as far as folk knew; he haunted the farms, begging, a little limping wretch, smooth and mild, but dangerous enough for all that—there was not a hair on his head and they never saw him wear a cap either; and he thanked and blessed you whether you gave or not. He was still a young man, you might say, and a merry soul. Lame he was and to spare, but he laughed and made light of it: why, look, if one leg's too short, the other's so much longer that it's quits; and it's fine for running on rough ground, the short foot trips so lightly over tufts and stones, *a-i a-i a-i oh!*

Now he came limping straight across the field and stopped beside Per. Per could hardly bear the sight of him, he was like the others in that and a bit more: he gave a jump as soon as he saw him; and why was

he always so meek and mild, this Lapp rascal? And why did he never wear a cap on his bald skull? What was it he wanted?

He brought many kind greetings from Juvik, he said. Juvik was a fine place; and fine people there. He gossiped and babbled, buttered Per well, it seemed to him, with soft and slimy words, of the Juvik folk and Haaberg and many other things.—"Go home and feed your lice!" Per growled from down below. Anders stood looking the Lapp up and down.

"Can you *gann?*" he asked all at once.

"Pray God to keep you from such talk, my dear! *Gann*, that's the same as praying to the Ugly Man!"

Per had come out of the hole to get the crowbar. Before he knew what he was doing he caught the Lapp by the collar and hoisted him out of the way: "Go to hell and don't ever come back again!" he warned him.

The Lapp shrieked at him: He brought greetings from the Black Rock, and from Morten Aune, and from Daaret and her brat, and—from brother Jens and—and —he he he ho! He roared like a devil squeezed in a doorway, thought Per; it gave him cold shivers. He was on him in a twinkling and heaved him away.

Andrias limped off eastward as fast as he could manage and didn't let a sound out of him till he was

almost under cover of the wood. Then he turned and laughed: "*A-i a-i a-i oh!*"

Per crowed a little too, and then he set about shifting the stone. The old fellow settled into his bed with a long, hoarse sigh; he was too old to protest. The dust rose all about him, and, sure enough, he took Per with him!

"No, wait a bit!" said Per, as he scrambled out again —"I don't want to lie here and rot!—They weren't sharp enough this time," he added.

Then he was going to fill up the hole from the heap of small stones. "That'll make it shallow for ploughing," said Anders. "What if you dumped them in the flax-dam yonder?"—"Now you're saying something," said Per; and so they did it. Per took the biggest stones and carried them, Anders came with the others. At last Per took to chucking them in anyhow, and Anders did the same. Per went at it till the sweat poured off him, the stones flew across like shavings. Ah, but it was good to feel one had a little tot of strength left.

But all at once he felt something odd, just as he was flinging a stone: as if somebody took hold of him. As if somebody drew a finger right across his stomach, a warm and kind finger, but it was just as if he came in two, his legs gave way under him and he felt queer all over. He picked up another stone, for this made him angry, but

there was no more strength in him, he couldn't throw it.

As it happened, the flax-dam was now filled in, so they were quit of both hole and stone, and Anders had to go home and see to the sheep, which were apt to stray into the wilds at nightfall.

Per stayed behind, putting the stones straight in the moonlight. As long as he didn't stretch himself, there was not much pain in his stomach; only he turned so cold and queer. "Must I really believe I've ruptured something?" He felt himself well over, though he would rather have let be. Oh yes, there was something wrong inside—he sat down. Now he felt cold in the face and empty about the chaps, like a thief that is caught in the act. "Am I going to be a cripple now, no use at all?" he growled; "what the devil's the good of that? Up to now—no Juvik man's ever ruptured himself," he fretted. And then, just *now?*—Oh, damn it, he'd soon be sound again; in a few months—a few days.

He got up. Then he felt distinctly that someone aimed a blow at him. "Heh?" he said and turned round. There! again he felt the wind of a blow. He hissed furiously through his teeth, like Jens when he fought:

"Muckworms! Beggarly crofters! Don't touch me, I warn you!"

The moon shone steadfastly, and pools and wheel-ruts

gave back its beams; it sounded as if the moonlight were playing with the stooks of corn, they shrank with a faint rustle. Black shadows to every stone, and deep night under every mountain. Not a soul about. For whom, then, was the moon shining?

Per roused himself sharply, took his spade, and went home. He walked stiffly, with clenched teeth, like a drunken man trying to walk straight; he wondered if a man had ever walked as quietly as he did now. As he went homeward it dawned on him why they should want to have a horseshoe on their prizing bar when they quarried stone; he had shod *his* with any old piece of iron. Had no steel on him either, not so much as his sheath-knife. He came slowly up to the farm; just a little quickly round the corner, a little smartly through the door; not many a one could do the like of that, he was sure.

He could take no food at supper, and he asked the man to see to the horses.

Next day he did nothing but potter about at home. It was rarely that Valborg asked him to lend her a hand, but that day she wanted his help to carry a tub full of washing out to the well. Per came and took hold, but he couldn't do it. "I hurt one of my hands last night," he said.—"Take hold with the other then!" said she.—"And my back too, I tell you!" he cried so that the

walls rang.—"Oho!" she said calmly. She had never heard him like this since the time they came here. And with that she carried out the tub alone.

He freshened up the old cross over the byre, when nobody was looking; he nailed up a horseshoe over the stable door. And he hid the blade of a knife in the bed, down at the bottom. He did it with a grin on his face, looking very artful.

Anders had seen it all, and now he wanted to know: was it a cure for runes and *gann,* that kind of thing? And when he was given no answer: did it keep off the little people maybe?

"Pish!" said Per. "But it's what they do at Haaberg. Every farm has its own ways, you see."

Was he ill? the boy asked later, and Valborg asked the same.—Oh, he had a kind of twinge about the body, just a little rheumatism in one hip—in his back, he meant.

They were not laughing when they asked him, that was sure. No, but if a woman gets to know that her man is ailing, that he's disabled ever so little, then it's all up with you. Ay, then it's all up.

4

There was a funeral at Paalsness. Andrias was no more. Ane had found him lying at the bottom of the

steps, and he was already gone. They found them like that, sometimes. It was hard to say what it *was*.

It was late autumn and a black frost. They had put plenty of pine-branches in the cart to steady the coffin, and they drove as gently as they could, but still it jolted and rattled in an ugly way; Ane bit her lips white when they came to the worst places. Otherwise she took it very patiently, did Ane; she had never looked for anything but adversity.

Folk talked kindly to her, for she was one of those you have to talk to. And they talked among themselves, when they were back from church. Paalsness had been such a model house since they were married. They were so well suited. She saved, and he helped her. She sighed, and he tried to do the same. She looked as if all the world was against her, and he did his best to back her up. A godsend he had thought of leaving her something: he had spoken to his nephew about it only a little before he died; he must have had a warning.

"Ay, a warning," sighed Ane. She had put her thumb through the crust cutting bread two days running, so that it left a round hole!—Ay, then one *knew!* they sighed all round the room.

Per Haaberg cleared his throat and joined in. They were talking about warnings, he said. They were talking about *foreshadowing*.—They had already been to

table, and Per had shown himself a different man, for they had such mighty good beer at this funeral, double strength! Now he stood in the middle of the room and found he was full of pluck, not a bit like himself. He had never got drunk before, but either he was drunk now, or—he was going to be. The others were not dumb either, the room was in a buzz around him, a big party of decent folk, were they talking of warnings? Ay, warnings! Signs and wonders! Why, there's a whole swarm of them all about us, you've only got to look and you'll see them. Ay; what happened to him last year when he went out sowing?—he went against the wind, the proper way, but still it was just as if someone took the corn out of his fist and slung it all over the place—he had no business to sow a single grain that day. And then this autumn, before he ruptured himself, he saw a great light in the sky which suddenly split across; ay, and once he thought the land split up before his eyes, the mountains in the south—

Had he ruptured himself?

Per blinked his eyes, they were dazzled by all these candles, and there he saw Valborg, staring at him.

"What are you grinning at, wife?" his cheeks were red as fire. Ay, he'd hurt himself a bit, across the stomach, reaching clumsily after a stone, but now he was as sound as a bell again, a new man! He hurried

on to something else: One day he'd heard the church-bell right away at Haaberg, against the wind. That was when Andrias was fey. And now this autumn, had they noticed it? there were two stars in the eastern heavens, one right under the other, hanging like a heavy weight from it; oh, there were scores of signs all round them, and if they heeded them—

—then they wouldn't go astray, no! said Valborg, laughing loud and harshly. Warnings of what *had* happened!

Hm, said Per. He turned away, muttering something to himself.

Their tongues had all ceased to wag the moment Per began, for it was such a surprise that he should stand there and tell them that; but now they were going again all round the room, the folk split up into little self-satisfied groups, chatting away to their hearts' content, that was what a festive gathering meant to them. Per only heard the buzz of voices, and here and there a word:

The screech-owl, they were saying; what were you to think about her? Crows and magpies, that was another story, they flew round the house and stole. The screech-owl didn't want anything—then what did she come out for? She was an evil bird.

Even Mikkal from Juvik had found his tongue now, he chatted away so that he didn't know himself. "I was

never hard put to it, only once: I was coming from the mill with a boat full of sacks, and the gale it blew and 'twas dark night and snowing thick, and the boat she was leaky and the baler was too small, and a swollen finger I had and a pain in my bowels; I didn't hardly know—"

Per cleared his throat and straightened himself. He shook off a heavy spite that was riding him, so he thought. He was no different from the rest, was not going to be either, he was one in the crowd, a note in the song, ay! Juviking? Juviking be hanged! "Just you wait till I get back my health!"—he turned to Aasel— "Take your time and you shall see! The Juvikings, they went *that* way. I go *this*. And what became of them, after all? Did they leave any trail behind them?"

He stood in silence awhile. The talk and the crowd drew him. He believed what they believed; he let himself sink so placidly into the midst of them.—Damn it all, one must have something or other to believe in, surely? Heh? But now let them come with a bucket, he was thirsty!

But they were not listening to him, someone had come in who made folk stare. A fine gentleman, in fur coat and Lapp boots. Now Per saw the man's dial—his face dropped, his cheeks slackened and turned grey, but his

eyes seemed to be nailed fast. He took a step forward:

"It's not true! It can't be you, curse me if it is!"

But it was, all the same, it was Jens; he came forward and greeted him, and then he went round and shook hands with everybody. Per chanced to look at Valborg. She didn't turn pale, didn't show a sign, only that she was a little slow in putting out her hand.

Jens talked loud and frankly: He had come all the way from the north, ay, all the way from Finmark, a fine trip it had been, and they had sailed like men. It chanced there was an *opportunity*, and so he thought he'd take it and have a look at the south again, visit his old haunts, as you might say, ha ha ha! And blest if he hadn't come just at the right time, from the look of it! Ay, ay, a swig of beer—here's a good year to everybody!

He seemed to have brought the breeze in with him, a little more and he'd have blown them all down. That was not a way to come storming in among folk, but one mustn't forget he had come from far away; strange oaths he had, and was like a stranger all over; welcome home to him!

When he had got through his greetings and had something to eat, there was not much more in him. Why, yes, a trader he had been, and was one still; and he was bound for the north again; but there was no go left

in him, he just sat with a half sneer on his face and looked round at the folk; now and again he scratched his beard.

His face was overgrown with a curly red beard, otherwise he was his old self, Per saw that at once. All the same he couldn't get it into his head that it was Jens. Just like that he was in old days too, only Per had never seen it. Hadn't seen that his eyes were so shifty, that his cheeks were so big and fierce, or that his chin was so much too small.—"Old blood in him," he muttered all at once. "And he's my own brother." He went out.

It was blowing outside, as usual at Paalsness; a worse hole for a gale off the land was not to be found. Youngsters used to ask their mother: "What's the wind doing when he doesn't blow?" And their mother always answered: "Then he's at Paalsness tearing down houses." "But the houses are still standing," thought Per. "If a house falls down at Paalsness, it's because it hasn't the wind to lean against."—The land-breeze swept round the corner, roaring like the surf upon the beach, dashing against the wall time after time and shaking the whole house. "Go at it!" said Per.—Stars twinkled all over the sky, big and restless; they must be embers the wind was blowing into a flame; as long as it didn't blow them down—that would make it too hot on earth, he laughed.

Per stood bare-headed in the wind. So his father used to stand, he remembered. And now Jens had come home, that was so. "Didn't I stand at the door one evening and see him come, the very image of him, a great white bull coming straight out of the wood? But what am I talking about—"

He put his hands behind his head. At that moment he felt that the Haaberg farm had become a meaningless burden on his back. The same as being a Juviking. No, he would go in again to the others. He'd go in to them as often as he could, they were good people. It couldn't be such a mighty big thing, to keep to oneself all one's days and believe nothing?—A stout heart, that was good enough, but for his part he'd rather be the man he was. "And don't come trying to interfere with me, I warn you!"

Per came in briskly. He did not look in Jens's direction. Nor did Jens look about for him. They both drank, and so did everyone else. When it began to get into Jens's head, he woke up again, and he didn't stop till he had put life into the whole room: they must have a dance. They had thought of that, many of them, and it was not long before they were dancing so that the whole house shook.

Per did not dance. He stood in the doorway and looked on. He had never seen a man so wild and merry

as Jens when he was dancing; it was not the face of a reasonable man, that: the Juviking had flown off the handle! The Juviking—there was only the outside of him left, and that was ugly.—"And we're not brothers, I'll swear!" he said.

The Haaberg folk did not go home till the next day, and then Jens came and joined them.

"How are things at Juvik?" asked Valborg.

Jens looked at her. He thought a moment, and then went on talking to Per. He had a tough hide.

Valborg faced Per, hands on hips, when they were alone. She had not squared up to him like this before, she was so broad and so freckled, so strong and handsome; she looked straight at him. "One fine day she'll go for me, with tooth and nail," he thought. "When she sees I'm down enough." And the very instant the thought struck him, he felt how it would go; he saw so sadly far ahead.

What was to be done now? she asked him.—Done now?—Ay. So that they could get him to take his wife and child and be off.

She was right, thought Per. There was not a man in the parish who had disgraced himself so deeply as Jens. Married the servant. And ran from his farm. It was bad; and Per had never given it much thought.

But when he turned it over, he bristled up against her and the parish and the whole disgraceful business.

"I'll have to talk to him," he muttered.—"Yes, I'll be bound you'll do that!" she sneered.—"No, likely enough I'll let be!"

5

He let be. A fortnight had gone by, and Jens was still at Haaberg. He lent a hand now and again on the farm, but most of the time he loafed about, went out walking in his fur coat, looked in on this or that acquaintance; they could all see what a big man he had become. They talked of it to Per: my word, how grand that Jens had grown; they'd find their match now, both parson and sheriff—he'd soon be going north again, wouldn't he?

Yes, he was going directly. He was only waiting for an *opportunity*.—Oh ay, an *opportunity*. It was no small fry that waited for the like of that. They didn't say it to be spiteful, Per could see that. They had forgotten both Daaret and Juvik. So that same fur coat had done its work, he guessed.

Per kept on at the work of clearing stones. There was not much snow, but he drove his sledge over the bare ground and took it out of his horses. They were grand nags to get work out of. He himself had to go cautiously about it, draw in his stomach, and save

himself all he could when he picked up a stone. It was worse still with his food. He took his meals as before, there was no getting out of that, but they did him no good.

Valborg kept her eye on him. She cooked the lightest food she knew of, and kept thinking what she ought to do. At last she spoke to Jens. She did it, though it was as little to her taste as spoilt victuals.—"I don't know," she said—"he doesn't seem quite right, Per doesn't."—"Per?"—"Ay, he's strained himself over a stone, it's my belief. He's ruptured himself."

Jens pricked up his ears when Valborg spoke to him, for it happened so seldom.—"Heh! isn't he more of a man that that? Ruptured himself? I warrant no Juviking has ever done that before. Then it's good-bye to the whole lot of us—and a pleasant journey!"

Valborg bit her lip hard.—"It was that Lame Andrias he fell foul of; happened to handle him a bit roughly; next day he got this. But if one could only keep him off the heavy work?"

Jens put down the gun he was playing with. Then he got out an old jacket and went off into the fields.

"I say, man, you'll have to let me take a spell of that!" he sang out. "I get so deadly sick of having nothing to do—you go home and chop wood for your wife."

Per looked at Jens, with a searching and wondering eye. Jens looked this way and that; then he broke into a laugh, for Per had seen right through him.

He might lend a hand at loading the sledge, said Per.

All right. And then they started to race. Each tried to find a stone bigger than the other and pitch it on to the sledge in workmanlike fashion, it was just like old days. At last Jens saw how this would end. Per was pale as a corpse; he clenched his teeth and ground them.

"Huff, no!" said Jens. "I can't keep this up. We'll try tomorrow."

"As you please," said Per.

Jens sauntered off home, and Per came on with the load. He still *walked*, it was no worse than that.

Presently Anders came up; he had been down on the pond skating. Per told him to get home and carry in the evening wood. "Quick!" he hissed, and the boy drew back, long in the face with wonder. But it was too late. Per bent over the stones and vomited. Anders stood by and saw it.—"Blood!" he whispered, and drew in his breath through his teeth as if he had fallen into cold water. Then he took to his heels and ran home.

What was the matter with *him?* his mother wanted to know.—Nothing.—Was it his father maybe?—"Ay. He brought up blood!" the boy turned sharp round and ran out of the door. Valborg sat down. She sat

quietly down, with her hands in her lap. She was alone in the room. There she sat looking into the fire until someone came in.

It was Jens. Valborg rose hastily; she could hardly bear the sight of him now. He came in jabbering louder than ever: "Do you know, Valborg, we've got the Swedes over us now, I was talking to the sheriff himself; it's as clear as day: this Karl Johan is King over Fredrikstein and the whole of Norway, what? Shame on him, say I!"

Valborg turned round to him. She had been considering.—Wouldn't it be better if he went over to Juvik soon, to look after his wife and child?—"Ay, you're saying something there."—"For we can't expect anything but misfortune and calamity in the family the way things are now. And the one who has to suffer for it hardest is the one that's least to blame."

Jens went up to the fire and stirred it. He had a mocking smile on his face: "They've sold the farm from me, I'm told." Valborg went on as if she hadn't heard him: "And another thing, Jens. How was it with Morten Aune and the Black Rock and that? Now you must answer me. For it's high time; Per—the Lord knows how it is with him—he may not last much longer! Don't stand there sniggering at me, this isn't any joke! Are we to have black vengeance hanging over us, just for

your sake?—you ought to be ashamed of yourself! For if that's it, what's the use of trying to be honest, what's the use of praying to one above?"

Jens winked one eye.—"You relish letting me hear all this, I can see that. But you're right in one thing: we're going downhill. And—maybe Per's in a bad way, I can't tell." He laughed to himself: "And he's the one, you see, who wants to know all about everything. Pulls his cap over his eyes and can't see a scrap for thinking—he's going to get to the bottom of this!"

Valborg came a step nearer.—So then he knew well enough what he had to do. Acknowledge his wife and child like an honest man. His eyes shifted hither and thither, like a thief's, she thought, but still she had the whip-hand of him, and this time she must win.—"I felt it in me when your father died, that the best days were done. It was all so *queer*. But I believe things might take a turn, if you'd only do your duty. Then Per could—do his. He'd have to go to the parson and tell him about Morten and that; then I hardly think the Lord would be one to kick against us; I feel it in me that the evil powers would have to give in."

"Ay, ay," said Jens, and it was just like a good man speaking. He went out again.

Next day Per had to keep his bed, and the day after too. Valborg kept him there with a gentle hand; he had

become like a little child and obeyed her without a word. Then came a time when he was up and about. He never spoke of his illness.

Jens and he sat in the chimney-corner of an evening, and sometimes they talked to each other a little, especially when someone else was by. Jens told of his adventures in Finmark, brought out one thing after another that came into his mind; wild and reckless doings, and scarcely the half of them could be true. They got worse and worse the oftener he told them; he carried them round among the neighbours too; but Per thought there was meat and drink in these lies, it did him good to share in them. He could sit and dream of them in the daytime, one by one: he and Jens, with knife and bottle, in an unknown land! They carried all before them!

But then he was back at Haaberg. One evening when they were alone he said: "That I should be hindered in my work like this! Have you *seen* the level below the houses, Jens? And all the rest? Haaberg—it follows me about wherever I go, like a cow. It asks a thousand things of me. Ay, and the houses: I've such a mind to pull them down straight away, build a kitchen and put in proper windows; I'm sitting on hot coals."—"Ay," said Jens, "it's pleasant to sit here and think it all out."—"Ah, but to *do* it, that would beat all."—

"Hm, that's as may be," thought Jens. "I for my part—" he yawned and stretched himself, looked at Per mockingly: "Here we sit, you and I. Isn't that so? And we're just as far on, both of us. Especially you," he added.

It was dark indoors. The fire blazed up now and then and threw its gleam on them: on Per, sitting with his cheeks in his hands; his face was white, and when he blinked, his ailment seemed to suck down his eyelids; on Jens, sitting there bearded and hard-bitten, but his face thawed every time the fire fell upon it. All at once he muttered to himself, looking sideways at Per:

"No, I wouldn't have stayed there anyway—at Juvik. But it's true," he added, "that no matter where a man wanders, he's just as homeless. That's the way of it, I reckon."

"It was something anyhow that you had it in you to want to come home. I suppose it's as they say: that we only look backwards. But I was so dead set on *trying*. Even if I had the Ugly One himself against me!"

Per had a fit of shivers as soon as he had said it. The darkness deepened and clung about him. He felt he had said a word too much.

A little while after, when he had to go outside, he found the truth of it. He walked right into him. It was in the doorway of the cattle-shed, he was feeling his

way in the dark, and then he got hold of him. It was like taking hold of a thick, shaggy stick. He was frightened, and he was furious, and so he hit out and tried to hold him fast. But then he was gone; he could only hear him rustling away in the darkness, and he gave a little cough; Per saw a tiny gleaming pig's eye staring at him. He went in for a lantern: there was not a thing in the byre door that he could have come against, the bare walls stood and grinned at him.

Not till late at night did the terror come upon Per. Valborg was asleep, and all the others were asleep. He shook her and woke her up.—"Is that you?" she said. "Yes, it's me." And under his breath he prayed, as fervently as he could: "But deliver us from Evil!" And, shame to say, it calmed him marvellously. Man was nothing but a worm against the powers of darkness, he could see that. At any rate when one was broken in health; then one had to have something to lean upon.

6

Jens took a few days to know himself, he was getting so meek and kind-hearted. He would have to do something. Then he came and told them, both Per and Valborg: he would go across the fiord, to Juvik. For *he* didn't want to bring vengeance and misfortune upon anyone. And when Valborg had gone he said it straight

out: "I suppose I'll have to take my poor wretch of a wife, such as she is, and the youngster, with me when I go. I've brought shame and trouble enough on you as it is. A fellow like me, who doesn't shrink from deserting his father's farm—that may seem enough, to most men. And while I'm there I may as well take a look at the Black Rock. See if I can't get Morten to lie still. If I promise him myself, or some other titbit. Will you come too, Per?"

The blood rushed into Per's cheeks. He had a burning desire to go, as in old days, when Jens hit upon something. But it soon faded, and he sat there pale and dazed, a broken man. "I don't hold with such foolishness," he said.

No, and perhaps he ought to be in *bed* now, with that weight hanging about his feet? thought Jens.

At that moment he caught sight of Anders in the doorway.—"I'll go with you!" he said, and said it so that his father could not forbid him.—"That's right!" said Jens. "Just what I expected. Will you trust the boy with me, Per?"

Per did not answer, and Anders went. Jens turned in the doorway and looked at Per with a crafty grin:

"If we come through this with a whole skin, the game's won. And then we shall be back tonight."

It was a long day, and a long night. Quite early

in the evening it grew pitch dark, and so still that you didn't feel a breath of wind. There was no bearing it indoors, and outside it was not much better. Then came the snow, blotting out land and sea, and now you could feel that the gale hung waiting behind the calm, like a dangerous man behind an unlocked door.

Late in the evening the storm burst, with full force. He handled the old Haaberg house roughly, and there was a bleak note in his voice. He was not out for any good.

Per was feeling bad, he had to turn in. He admitted to himself how it was, but to Valborg he said there was nothing to sit up for.—"Don't you have any fear for Anders. We've faced Lapp *gann* and other devilry before now—just you wait and see!"

Valborg did not listen to him and said not a word. She was pale as a whitewashed wall.

At last she came to bed. They lay a long, long time.

"I can feel plain enough that the boy's on the water now," said Per. "But you're not to let that trouble you."

He got up, went to the door, and stood, half dressed, in the snow, came in again; then he made up the fire. Valborg lay still in the bed.

"Do you think—that we'll never see him again?" he asked all at once. "Can't you answer me, Valborg?"

"If only one knew—what the answer was!"

Per settled himself by the fire. Valborg sat up in bed. They found that time was not moving, and they didn't expect it to move either. They could hear Anders every instant, his voice was all over the house, so clear and fresh. "If I come back, I shall come tonight," he said. Per leaned forward sobbing aloud with his hands before his face: "Oh, yes, yes! You'll come, won't you? You can't do anything else."

Then they came, both he and Jens. There was a clatter outside the house and the door was flung open violently; now they were in the passage, and Jens was full. It was not the first time he had come home like that. He cursed loud and lustily, stumbled against the wall, lay there and was busy for a while, and then he yelled: "Heh! do you spew up good drink, you dirty scut? Up with you, Jens!" With that he crawled to his feet and Anders helped him upstairs—now they were singing, both of them—so Anders was drunk too.

Next day they slept till late and came down from the loft together.—"You heard us *come*, didn't you?" said Jens. "For come we did, damme, though I had to go on all fours right up from the beach! They had such a mighty lot of liquor at Juvik; God forgive me, I forgot what I'd gone for. Well, we settled the Black Rock fellow all the same. We lay there a good spell and

defied him to show himself. No. Then we asked if he'd like to be put in hallowed earth, if he 'thirsted for the churchyard.' Not a word—he's not there, bless you! We offered to change places with him; oh, no, not a bit. Well, yes, then there was the storm, but that seemed to come from another quarter. And home we came, as I'm telling you; we had him beat!"

Jens was just swinging round to go out. Then something checked him. It was Valborg. She had put down her work, and her cheeks were blazing.

"Now you'll get out of this, I tell you." She was calm, dangerously calm, as she said it. But it didn't bite on him. "You may run away from your wife for all I care, and disgrace the whole lot of us; but I'll tell you *one* thing: you shan't stay another night in *this* house!" She turned and looked at Per: "For we have children, if we haven't anything else."

"You're saying something," said Jens; he was as dry as a grindstone. "As soon as they're here with the sloop and we get a fair wind. I'll take my gear and go east to Paalsness tonight then—it's so pleasant to have a roof over your head at night-time."

Valborg had gone out, closing the door quietly behind her. Per said nothing, and Jens was not so unkind as to look at him. He put on his fur boots and fur coat, got his trunk, and then he held out his hand:

"May you live long and prosper, Per, and thanks for all—er—and thanks for all, ay—and good-bye!"

He went round saying good-bye; Valborg he found out of doors, and took her boldly by the hand; he was in fine fettle.

Per did not see him out; he stayed sitting where he was.

The men went back to the barn, and the maids went out to their work. Only themselves were left indoors.

Then Per got up. He stood staring down at the floor for a moment, snorting and breathing hard through his nose; his shoulders went higher and higher.—In old days they had their own way of dealing with the like of this, he said to himself. He pierced Valborg with his eye—she stood there as though waiting for it.

"Who told you to give orders here?"

"Orders?"

"I'm asking that, ay."

"Somebody has to give orders when there's a call for it."

"Call?" He came threateningly close to her.

She laughed in his face: "What's gone wrong with you, man?"

Then he went white all over his face, as if he had torn open a fatal wound. But the next moment he flushed deeply, his face was ugly and unrecognizable.

He caught her by the hair and slung her head this way and that. At first Valborg let him do it, but presently she resisted, her body rebelled against it, her neck grew stiff as a post. She said, so low that nobody might hear:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Per!"

"Ashamed?" He let go of her. His face was flecked with red and white.

"Ay.—And besides—you ought to take some care of yourself, now."

"Take care of myself—heh! Is that it? Do you think they took care of themselves in old days? A man's got to be master in his own house, I should think—it's for *you* to take care of yourself!"

"Well, whoever it is that's master—the one that has the sense will have to use it, and give the orders too!" she shouted it at him; and now her feelings were too much for her, the tears welled up, but that was what she least wanted; and besides she caught sight of Anders outside the window, he had stopped and looked in. "Fie, for shame, Per!" she sobbed.

Then he seized her, flung her against the wall so that the whole room shook, and fell to beating her. He knew quite well what he was doing; a cold growl went all through him:

"It's got to be. It's got to be!"

When he had finished, it was all he could do to reach

the bench. He did not know if she had resisted, but it had taken all his strength, he had damaged himself so that the room swam before him. Valborg went out. Not till then did he notice Anders or hear what he said. "Father!" he had cried, and now he came and stood facing him, banged his fist on the table, red in the face like a furious Juviking:

"Fie, for shame, father!" His voice broke, but he went at it again: "Just you try another time to lift your hand to mother, then devil take me—"

Per smiled. He was not equal to getting up and giving the young hound a thrashing, and so his face smiled of itself, did the wisest thing it could.—"Go out and chop some wood, you," he said. Presently he went on, but he was speaking to himself now:

"If it had been one of the old fellows. He'd have taught the woman to keep her place, pretty near!"

"Not mother—I won't have it! And if you do, I'll go straight for you!" Anders was trembling all over, and now he made for the door.

Per was alone in the room. But he heard Anders outside, talking to his mother now:

"You hear what I say, mother: you've got to obey father!"

"Not after this, child. Get out of my way."

When Valborg came in, she made as though Per was not in the room. Per felt he had lost.

But that youngster had given him a surprise. Who would have believed he had such guts in him already? And Evil, there's no one can deliver us from that; it's bound to come, whatever's in store for us.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TROUGH OF THE WAVE

1

IT CAME OVER PER LIKE A SWEAT ONE EVENING, THAT now he would go to Lame Andrias. It was strange he had not gone before; and just as strange that he was now on the road; he had not been out walking for two years.

He listened about him for the wind: it was here just now? No, there wasn't a breath stirring, the air was dead still; only the clouds were on the move, they sailed eastward, were going to the mountains for the night. Per was too lightly clad, had only meant to go and sit awhile on the Knoll; but now there he was, on the road, and had gone a good way. He glanced up at a star which shot across the southern sky: that was a soul on the way to heaven. Ay, that was where it was bound for. *He* was going east, to pitch into Lame Andrias.

Pitch into him? Well, or however it might turn out. Let it go as it may, he said. He could see the rascally Lapp already. "Mind yourself!" he said; "don't let me get hold of you again!" Oh, he knocked him about

cruelly—but what was he to do? For Andrias just laughed. Just stood there sweating spitefulness and puffing himself up.—Per was not so sure about going. For what had he to fall back upon, if this devil wouldn't make him sound again? He slackened his pace; it almost seemed he was going on his knees to the scoundrel. No, now you must pull yourself together! And now he was his own father, old Per Anders, to the life—what would you do, Per Anders? Do you think you could live without your health?

"Devil take me!" said Per furiously, and with that he turned to go home. "Do you think I'll ask mercy of the lousy beggar?" And he jerked his head eastward to where the Lapp lived: "Devil a bit can *he gann!* He can't make it good again either—all he can do is to limp about!" He went home. And now he found he had walked three miles or more, he had actually come all this way—it was uncanny how fast the time had gone.

Hale he didn't need to be; he begged that of no man. For it was all up with him—had been for two years. And if he hadn't humbled himself before, he was not going to do it now. The world was as grey as twilight, and full of ghosts and powers of evil; if one was to make one's way fairly in it, one had to walk warily. He had been sitting still for two years now and had learnt that. And yet he was unafraid—that was what

you might call being stout-hearted. The Juvikings, they had all been like that; one believed what one had to believe, but one didn't cry for mercy.

Per had calmed down. There was this about health: it was so hard to do without it. If you could lure it back to you, that would be well worth while. But he didn't care; let them keep it who had it. No doubt folk looked on him as one who had been chastised. Stupid folk are still folk, but Lord! how little sense they have. All the same, he groaned when he thought of them.

It is never still in the forest on a night of autumn. There is a rustling and a padding under all the trees, a blind and timorous faltering that gropes and gropes and gets nowhere, little straying, poverty-stricken steps, a pitiful wandering to listen to. It is the fall of the leaf. It is winter feeling its way.

Per stopped and listened to it; then he went on again. Slowly and cautiously—an ailing man. So he had been for two years now—"and that's no bed of roses for one of our sort," he said. Now he would have to drag himself home and be a sick man again. One chance he still had left, and that was the churchyard. The churchyard at blackest midnight, a dead man's bone or whatever it might be, there was power in that! And there was nothing shameful in it, 'twas a cure grown-up folk might use. But Per was not so sure: he thought he

would hardly come to that. They had been long enough, these two years, many a day there had been in them; but still he had never had a real mind to it. And it would be the same again. He would not lower himself for so small a thing!

All of a sudden he walked into Lame Andrias, who happened to be loitering along the Lauvset road in the dusk. The Lapp gave him a greeting, frank and free, stopped and took his time: "So you're out walking, I see?"

Per had thought of passing on, but instead he went close up to Andrias:

"What the devil are *you* running after, heh?"

It seemed to Per that the Lapp's eyes stabbed through the darkness; they were black and bright, such eyes as you never see in anything *human.*

"You'd better beware!" he warned him, making his voice as low and deep as he could. But then he changed his tone, and Per himself was even more surprised than the Lapp: "Now you *shall* tell me, was it you who took away my health?"

"Pray God, Per, to keep your mouth from such wicked talk!"

Per's jaws were quaking, he was quaking all over; a weak and ailing man, he could hardly stand.

"Ay, ay," he said. "Do as you please. But you

shouldn't regret it. If you made me sound again. You shouldn't do it for nothing."

He walked on, as soon as he had said these words; he couldn't bear to stay any longer; faugh, what a stink! But Andrias followed him. He simpered and pleaded as blandly as could be: Per was not to think he was a *gann* Lapp; he hadn't learnt a word of that, wouldn't dare to use it either, for it was uncanny work, it was hell-fire for your soul, God have mercy on us, there was no *gann* left in the length and breadth of the land. No, but ghosts and goblins and the wee people, if you had them against you, then you'd better look out—oh, one was nothing but a crawling worm—

"To hell with you out of this, you dirty Lapp!" Per blazed out. He was walking like a giant. Sick he was, but dangerous to meddle with—"Get out of my light!" He would go home and be a sick man all his days.

It was almost as if he awoke out of a dream. He was in a sweat.

The forest and the hill-sides had been wrapt in a deep sleep. Now they quickened again, there was an awakening murmur all about one, a whispering and a snatch of song, now one heard it on this side, now on that. Now it whispered close to one's ear, and now it called, laughing, far away. The breeze was in everything around, questioning and answering itself all through the

darkness. "No!" said Per, letting it fill his lungs; "it's not only the wind. It's many things. There's more alive here than wind and weather. Let it live, that wants to live; it's not for a sick man to meddle with it. But there's many things, and if I'd had my health—"

Haaberg lay high and still before him, with black roofs against the pale green sky; it looked so forlorn when one came from the east. And everything was asleep, as though Per did not exist. The shoulder of the mountain to the northward had taken on its night-time face, cold and lonely enough to drive one indoors; and behind it the sky had a look of death and eternity—one might be better off where one was.

But there was Anders standing out on the Knoll. "He's been waiting for me," thought Per.

"Have you been out walking?"

"Been taking a turn, ay."

Per stopped and wiped the sweat off him. Anders looked the other way.

"I might give that Lame Andrias a dusting, if I catch him." Anders said it without turning round, as he might have spat or yawned. But then he dropped his head, bashfully, and would have made off.

"That one? I've been having a word with him myself, child. For that matter—*he* can't do anything, don't come talking nonsense to me!"

He had entered another world, the moment he saw Anders there; he scarcely noticed it, but it seemed an easy thing now to go in and take to his bed. Only it made him wonder how little Anders had been in his mind since he had been ailing; he had thought much more of Valborg, and she went on as if she didn't see him.

2

Per was sitting out on the Knoll, next day. It was brilliant autumn weather and all the crops were well under roof. He liked to sit here in the day-time, in fine weather, like today. The Haaberg lands lay taking their ease, not yet clear of bushes and big stones and stretches of swamp, but there were broad acres and green meadows between, so rich and lush under the autumn sun, 'twas as good as a meal to see them. When he went over it like this, piece by piece, he could clean forget himself: before he knew where he was, he was clearing stones again, making the whole farm anew. "I was meant for that," he said to himself; "Jens for pulling down, and I for turning inside out and putting it all in order." Today it was the swampy fields that annoyed him—there the little people danced every blessed night, for sure. But he'd soon change that, and the stones would have to go—out of the way, pixies, here

we come! He could already hear the sound of the plough, roaring like the breakers on the beach; oh, that was the boy to drive away the vermin.

But Per soon recalled how things were. He was done. So far he had come, but here was the flat rebuff. How it had come about was all the same to him. And now it would soon be two years since the wife took the reins. She didn't do badly either; who'd have thought it? Valborg was not to be sneezed at. And she wouldn't look at him, and he wouldn't look at her; they slipped past each other as if they'd been greased. But that was another thing he had to put up with, a wife who wouldn't take punishment!

The worst was when he was in company. It was a disgrace: a young man in the prime of life, and a Juviking to boot, who dragged himself about with a taint on him! The whole parish pointed at him—the man who had made a mess of it. That was why he kept out of their sight. And that was why he had started off east yesterday evening, he remembered that now.

All at once he plucked a lump of moss and flung it, his pain was more than he could bear, he stared before him, stiff in the face: "I've been going on like a Turk, and the Lord's been like a Turk to me; that's all I can make of it!"

Then he sat still, wagging his head.—"If only it was as simple as *that*," he said. "But there's a thousand things, the world is full of all sorts, it makes my head go round. A thousand things against you, and not one you can take hold of. And I *must* have a hold of something. If I could lay my hand on this devilry, I believe I could cure myself!"

Per was a melancholy object, as he sat there. He had shrunk to a shadow, pale and sallow and lean so that nobody would have known him, his lips were blue as a dead man's. But his eyes were the worst, sunken and bloodshot, yet they glared with a burning threat at the whole world.

But what was that? Was it the big bull that had got loose? Yes, of course, they had turned him out to grass together with the rest of the cattle, the whole herd was down in the meadow. And now he comes rushing up the road, bellowing enough to make your blood run cold; it must be womenfolk he's after. He's wild for them, heh!—ay, some of us are that, he he—now he's tearing fit to shake the ground, now they can pick up their skirts and run for it. Per dragged himself farther along the mound: aha! there they came, two womenfolk, one grown up and one little girl, and the woman held up her skirt and showed him her petticoat, and it was red! A worse thing they couldn't have done to

Gustiborg, they were offensive enough to him without that, the womenfolk. But this was beyond a joke now, for she was lame, one of them, and the little girl pulled and tugged at her as hard as she could and got nowhere, and soon the bull would be on them—now he could see who they were, Ane-Marget Liness and Massi. Per jumped up, strong and light of foot as when he was a boy, picked up a stone, and started to run down the slope. "He'll kill me, sure enough," he said, "but that's all one"; for there had never been so big and wild a bull in the parish. But then he could do no more, he doubled up and staggered this way and that, his feet wouldn't carry him any farther. What in Jesu name was he to do now?

There was a shout from the summer byre, a loud, clear voice, a war-cry: "Gustiborg!" and the bull checked himself an instant and began to snort and tear up the ground—it was Anders who came running down, picking up stone after stone without losing pace; never had Per seen anything on two feet move so fast. The women stood as though transfixed, and Per too. Now the bull went for them, Per drew in his breath as if he had seen a ghastly wound; but at the same instant Anders was there. His first stone got the bull on the cheek, the next on the ear, at last one rang on his horn; but he had no more, and now the monster put his head to

the ground and his horns were close to Ane-Marget. Anders made straight for him, got behind, and caught him by the tail; then came a dance like a whirlwind in flying snow. Per saw that the boy's life was at stake, and he could do nothing to help him. He called to the women to save themselves, and at last they came to their senses, Ane-Marget limped up the hill and into the house; but Massi turned again and stayed to see what would happen. "Run and help him, can't you!" she cried to Per; her face was white as snow, and her teeth chattered—"he'll kill him!"

Anders has let go and cuts down the meadow, the bull after him like a red streak; now Anders reaches the heap of stones and is saved—that brute of a heap that Per had never got them to clear away. The stones rain fast, the bull halts and puts his head to one side, he daren't open his eyes, at last one rings on his horn again, Per can hear it all that way off. The bull swings away for a second, gets another stone in a worse place, and dashes off sideways like a whipped dog. Anders after him, picks up a switch, and then they're away west over the fields, Anders beating him lustily, ay, Per can feel it through and through—that now Anders means to drive the mischief out of him; it gives Per the same thrill to watch him—now he's the master and means to

be. The beast pulls up again and again, but as soon as he feels the switch, he starts off once more.

Now Anders comes up the hill. Per sits quivering like a wet dog. The little girl still stands there sniffling, though perhaps she doesn't know it. As soon as Anders looks at her, she turns and goes indoors. She had white hair, and light-blue eyes which forgot to blink; a fine blue frock and red socks.

Anders sat down by his father. He was now about fourteen, and as big as many a grown man. He smiled and gave a little laugh as he wiped the sweat from his forehead: "I almost think I gave him something to go on with." But his eyes were full of fight, there was such a keen blue in them, they searched the fields as though they had not yet found what they really wanted to tackle. Per took a long look at them, and at the boy's face and the whole of him.

He too had once looked just like that, he felt, just as tall and supple and broad-shouldered, with the same small feet; oh, it was good when you could jump your own height standing—when you never made way for anybody! But such straightforward eyes he had surely never had; that was not to be.

And now Anders was as good as master here. Per felt how it warmed him all through, so new and unexpected—now they came and raised him to his place.

Young Anders—Anders boy. For this was himself over again, however you might turn and twist it—don't come talking to me! Now they could soon go ahead in earnest, with a new tally. Now they would have something to show, when Haaberg was all finished and to rights. "Now you can look up from your graves, Juvikings, and see if you know yourselves!" he said. "We'll give you something hard to bite on." It was all he could do not to hit the boy on the head with his stick, to hear how hard it sounded.

After that he was weak and shaken. Now he might go in and lie down. He had a creepy feeling—it was leaking out of him now, what they called life, ay, that was so, but it was good to sit here awhile yet. And even if he couldn't get indoors without help, it made no difference; he wouldn't trouble the womenfolk just yet.

The mountains faded into their finest purple for him, like a farewell, you might call it. And the autumn air sparkled invitingly wherever you looked; the sun shed gold on the wooded slopes and on the meadows, and the clouds stood still and looked at themselves in the fiord while daylight lasted; their faces shone so brightly, there was God's peace in them. Haaberg was a good home.

"Isn't it, Anders?"

"Oh ay. What's that you say?"

"Haaberg. It's good enough here?"

Anders looked at his father, turned his eyes on him calmly and firmly; then he looked away again:

"I should think so."

There was power in those words. They could move mountains. "I should think so!" Per repeated them again and again, within himself.

Per got up, he would go in now. But he hadn't the strength, he sank back again and lay trembling, and then he had a fit of vomiting. It was black blood that came up.

"Don't matter a bit, Anders. 'Twill soon be time—to be laid under the sod, to the others."

"Don't say that, father!"

"Do you want me to go about like any other cripple? No. And now there's no need."

Anders helped him in. He had to carry him almost.

Per crept into bed at once.—"It's good to stretch yourself out," he said. The bed stood in the living-room, and there were the visitors, Ane-Marget and the little girl, and Valborg. Per lay looking at them. He did not hear much of what they said, he was in such cruel pain.—Anders had taken his place opposite, against the other wall, and there he sat and was master of the house. A tiny bit bashful he was, didn't seem to make his eyes go the way he wanted. Oh no, Anders, bulls and the like one can deal with, but a little sprig of

womanhood with fleecy hair, that's something different. She let her eyes stray wherever they pleased and forgot to blink them, up and down all over him they went; but when they chanced to look at each other, they darted away as if they'd been burnt. Oh yes, Anders had a great mind to go outside now, somewhere behind the houses where he could be all alone—just you go, my boy, you won't go very far. Not likely; you sit where you are, looking at your fists and at the floor. Oh ay, it'll be for you to lay a new floor here; and she there, she'll scrub it and scrub it with all her heart, till it's frayed and worn out and waiting for a new one. A pair of them, ay. They wouldn't bring her home to him from over the water; oh no, not that—it'll be those two one autumn evening, behind the corn-stooks in moonlight and fine weather, she can't get away, and he comes up and takes her by the arm, eh?—and then she's powerless for life. Ay. *She* won't bristle up against him, that's certain. Then there'll be a houseful of white mops at Haaberg.—Per gave a little happy sigh as he lay.—And Petter, now he had him too in his mind's eye: if only Valborg would put a little bit of stiffening into him, there'd be a man of Petter, no fear of that. For that matter, one might close one's eyes straight away. Valborg's not one to let go her hold. He grew happier and happier as he thought of her; for she had such a good

face, she might be a mother for both him and them—that was really what she had come here for.

Per lay with a smile about his eyes; but his lips puckered little by little, and one wrinkle after another came into his forehead, like ridges in the sand at ebb-tide. When the pain inside tore him too violently, he braced his foot against the end of the bed and grasped the bed-clothes so that his finger-joints cracked. Then the same look came into Anders's face, the same wrinkles tried to come into his forehead too.

3

Per did not get up any more, nor did anyone expect it. He lay there and did tolerably, he thought.

Valborg went in and out as usual. She looked after him as well as she could, but she did not look at him. Per kept his eyes on her and wondered: A devil of a woman she was, who wouldn't take punishment. She wouldn't have minded poisoning him, he thought, but forgive him, no, that she could not.

And what did it matter? For it was so strange when one lay as he was lying. Everything looked different. Especially now, since he had discovered Anders. "She thinks she manages us, she does," he said to himself; "when it's we who manage her and all the rest. We two!" he said, striking his hand on the bedstead—it was

a weak and lean hand now, with no more force in it than a child's. "But just you wait till Anders takes it into his head to strike!"

A strange gift was vouchsafed him now. He saw all things in an airy vision, both what had happened and what was to happen, thus and thus it fell out; and it was always Anders he had before him, he *was* Anders through and through, lived in him year by year into the future.

Oh, those young scamps! They were like a treasure of silver to him. Whatever they might be up to, he knew it and took part in it; 'twas enough to heal a wound.

How well he remembered one time when they were small! The parson was out and about one day, going to visit a sick crofter. On his way home he looked in at Haaberg, and as he came out, the boys were in the yard, laughing and fooling and a bit above themselves. The parson asked them their names. "Per," said Petter. "Paal," said Anders. "Ah, I see, Peter and Paul, fancy that!" said the parson. Petter opened his eyes wide and looked at the sea: "Curse me if it isn't herring the gulls are after down in the voe."—"*What* do you say!"—"*Curse* me if it isn't, that's what I say!" The parson went back to their father in a great state, but Per just laughed. He called them in though, afterwards. "It was Anders that put me up to it," lied Petter, looking

boldly at his father. Anders stared at the floor. So *he* got the thrashing, his back was dusted till he could only hobble. They hid themselves behind the stable, and Per could hear how they laughed. "That won't be the last time you have to bear the brunt, Anders," he said, as he recalled it.

And so they carried on. One night they heard a racket and a desperate shouting up in the loft. What was it? It was Steffen Big-Shoes. He used to go up there after a maid they had; she slept in the loft, and the youngsters slept there too—Steffen slept in the stables. This time he had gone up into the dark loft and got mixed up in a mass of brambles and fishing-lines and all kinds of odds and ends; an old tub had come down on his head and he thought the house was falling—he shouted for the maid with all his might, for this must be witchcraft and dirty work:

"Ele-o—Ele-o-nora, come and get me out!"

One evening at Christmas-time a beggar Lapp came tramping to the farm and asked for food. The maids were away and Valborg was in the byre. The boys promised him porridge if he would wait. Per dozed off, and when he looked up again, the Lapp sat eating porridge. When Valborg came out of the byre, the man was rolling on the floor. He had polished off a dish of raw groats. Valborg was furious, but the man begged

the boys off so meekly: "They didn't mean me any harm!"—He came off with his life, as it happened.

This kind of thing delighted Per. It was life, this, and life was a wonderful thing.

Ane sometimes came over from Paalsness, and Aasel from Juvik. Aasel had not much to say, for this was such a sad business about Per. Ane talked about her own affairs, from the time she came to the time she went away. "There's nothing left of Ane but the drop on her nose," said Per.—"Ah, but it's a bright one," said Anders.—"And it wears well," said Petter.

The last thing Per did was to bring about an agreement between her and her husband's heirs. He asked them to come, and he talked to them. "I tell you, if you don't leave her in peace, I'll come after you from the churchyard!" he said, and he gave them a look that brought them round: thus and thus it was to be.

Then he had the crofters with him one evening and told them that now it was Anders they had to deal with. And Anders was like this: if they showed themselves sensible, they'd find him so too.

He looked at Anders as he said it. It had come to this, little by little, that Anders had to be always at hand; but then he had become so open and trustworthy as he had never been before. At last Anders had to stay by him night and day. So they both wished it.

The nights were so long for Per, for his sleep was gone. A strange thing—nobody had lain like this before. For long spells he would lie listening. The night was so alive. Everything found a voice out in the darkness, and he heard each thing and distinguished it. There was first and foremost the wind, the old wind that haunted the place and swept along the walls and tried to get in. Per missed it when it was gone. There stood the houses, talking to one another. And there was the mountain, and there the sea. The earth lay on its back and sang. And the hidden waterfall talked so unweariedly, talked to the night and to itself.—Sometimes he had the stars. There they hung, those two; one just below the other. And so all over the sky; they wrote and they pointed, this way and that. Oh, Anders, it takes some skill and some patience, life does—what's become of you, Anders? Then there was nothing but the darkness around him. That stood there waiting patiently enough—wouldn't he come soon? Oh yes; he wouldn't be long.

4

At last the end came. It was a moonlight night, as when his father died. Aasel had come across early in the evening, she had a sort of feeling how it was.

Towards night Per began to moan and fret, as he had

often done of late: "Can't you put rockers under my cradle, Anders? You see I'm lying here like a little child, don't you? Can't you carry me out into the sunshine? I'm lying in a pitch-dark cellar." But then he plucked up courage again and was fully conscious.—"Do you think, Anders, that any of the others have lain like this and known what was coming?"—No, Anders couldn't say. "No," smiled Per. "None of the Juvikings has tried this. And now, Anders, now I'm busy thinking. Heh? When the body's done for, you see, the thoughts begin. And they're strong. Go clean through a mountain. I see everything. I see you before me like a great tree, Anders. Nothing to be uneasy about. You and I, you know!"

But as soon as Anders was out of sight, his fears came on him: "There's such a chilly cry outside, what is it? What's become of you, Anders? I'm lying here all by myself, on my back, can't turn over. Every one of them—has gone and left me."

Anders bent over him and talked him round:

"There. That'll be better, you'll see."

And Per whimpered in a clear childish voice:

"Ahaha! That's much better! But how do you think it'll be with Jens?"

Aasel sat on the bed beside him. She was pale and

strange-looking, and Per did not know her at first.—"What if we sent for the parson, Per?"

"Parson? Ay, there can't be any harm in that."

No, for then he could confess how it was, about Morten Aune and all that was on his mind.

On his mind? He looked about for Anders, caught his eye: "There's nothing on my mind—is it likely?" He summoned all the strength he had left and raised himself on his elbow: "No, Aasel, I'll tell you one thing. It was *the Lord's hand*, child, that was against me. *The Lord's mighty hand.* I couldn't stand up against that, could I, Anders? I see it in the stars and in everything there is—Anders and I." With that he turned away from her.—"No, Anders, I lie here with honour. The little people and Lapp *gann* and all such like—they have their power. And we have ours. But if we have *Him* against us, then we're too weak. And now I'm to take my staff and go. For now I see nothing else before me but you. And you're like a great wild cherry-tree, Anders, with blossom and fruit both—now we'll make a fresh start, Anders!"

But Aasel couldn't let him be. Her shoulders were bent, she was not far from tears—"But if you'd try to pray, Per, just the least little bit? That the Lord would forgive you everything?"

He looked at her, and from her to Anders again, more

and more uneasily, till he met the boy's eyes and was comforted.—"Ay, there's no shame in that," he said. Aasel was glad, and clasped his hand. But he drew it back. One could see there was something at work in him.

"No. I will not. I'd rather—suffer my punishment. We're not that sort. Are we, Anders?—I'm best off among our own. And fair's fair. I will die with honour, Anders! *They* will have it so."

There was silence in the room. Aasel got up from the bed and went and sat on a stool. Valborg was sitting by the stove. She was shaking all over, but not with terror; she hated Aasel for coming and upsetting Per like this, and now she looked at her with a cold smile: there, she could hear he was no small man! She herself had seen how small he was, and that was her joy; even so, the others didn't come up to his shoulders.

Aasel went upstairs and lay down. They were to wake her if there was any change. Valborg lay on her bed. Hour after hour went by.—"Are you there, Anders?" asked Per from time to time.

And then he whispered, in sudden fear:

"Now you must hold on to me, Anders. I'm going now! Downhill, over the mountains—can't you hold on to me just a little?"

He lay choking and wheezing one hour and two hours; it was an eternity. All at once he gave a little laugh:

"There's Morten, outside. Take care Anders doesn't come out and get you!—There—they're knocking on the wall for me, don't you hear it, Anders?"

"It was yourself, that's all; you were doing it yourself."

"Ah, was that it?"

He rallied, so strangely that Anders scarcely knew what to think.

"But what's this, father, do you want to suck my hand?"

"Hm, no, that—that's not it either."

Anders stood as if he had been burnt. His father had kissed the back of his hand.

"But hold on to me now—do you think we shall get across, Anders? I've been down in a trough of the waves all my time—now we're going up again—what's become of you? *It was our kin that brought me here, Anders!*"

That was the last he said. Anders held the candle before him and waited till it flickered no more. Then he closed the mouth and laid his finger on the eyelids.

Valborg was asleep over in the other bed; she had had no proper sleep for many nights. Now she awoke and

sat upright. She did but look at Anders, and he muttered something like a yes.

She sat in her bed. He over on the bench.—No, it was still outside. A still, clear night. A faint breath of wind stirred in the forest and floated away. Not a dog barked. Not a sound came from the stables. It was *the hand of the Lord.* And that brings stillness in the air. Valborg forgot that Anders was in the room.

"Now it has come," she said. "What was so much in my mind when I came away from home.—But the Lord knows why *he* should be struck down."

5

Liness was again the host at this funeral ale. Broader than ever he stood at the door and received the guests, and never had he purred so benevolently over every dram, and never drunk so faithfully with each one of them. He stuck to it till he was well heated, but even so he could not raise any spirit in them. They didn't know how to take it. "See here, men," he said; "we're going across now to take a look at Per; any of you that want to can come along; there's no compulsion; if anybody don't want to, I'll make him." They came dribbling quietly after him, and just as quietly they dribbled back. And they ate and they drank, and the corpse was sung out with a hymn, and the bell tolled over it, they

came back and went to table again, did their duty by it, so that at the last the room was in a buzz of talk. But there was no ring in the folk, said Liness; they were like a bell without a clapper. The trouble must be that they couldn't believe he was dead, the man whose funeral they were keeping. It was not that they were bothered about where Per had gone, as he had died before his time; no doubt he had gone where he ought to go; but what were they to say?

Next day there was a let-up, when they came to table for the last time. Then Anders seated himself at the head of the table, taking his place as the custom was in those days. He was now master of the house.

"Welcome to my table, folk!" he said. "And thanks, all of you, for seeing father off on his last journey. He ought to have had a better funeral ale; but we've done the best we could."

He said it like a grown-up man. At first they looked at him with rather long faces, and his mother was upset. But as they met his eyes one by one, they settled down. He did not smile, did not turn red even; he sat with the butt of his knife planted on the table and turned a steady eye on them: they hadn't come here to be bashful, had they? With that he fell to on the food, and they did the same. It was like a new room they were sitting in.

He stood at the door and took them all by the hand, as they went away one after another.

It grew into a little legend in the parish, this of Anders of Haaberg: he was quite a man, that boy, he was so. *He* knew how to take his place, and he filled it. This and that he had said at his father's funeral; it grew into a long string of good words, as it passed from man to man. Soon there was no one who remembered Per any more.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

This book is composed on the Linotype in Bodoni, so-called after its designer Giambattista Bodoni (1740-1813) a celebrated Italian scholar and printer. Bodoni planned his type especially for use on the more smoothly finished papers that came into vogue late in the eighteenth century and drew his letters with a mechanical regularity that is readily apparent on comparison with the less formal old style. Other characteristics that will be noted are the square serifs without fillet and the marked contrast between the light and heavy strokes.

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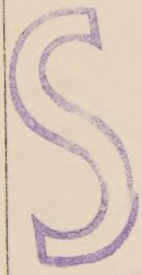

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